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C A T O

TO

L O R D B Y R O N

ON THE

*Immorality*

OF

HIS WRITINGS.

---

How poor! how rich! how abject! how angust!  
YOUNG.

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L O N D O N :

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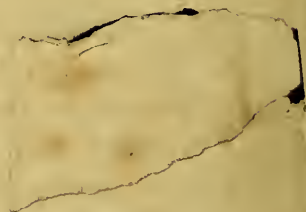
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C A T O

TO

L O R D   B Y R O N .

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MY LORD,

IT will probably occasion you no surprise that a poet who disregards decency should subject himself to animadversion. In assuming the liberty of this address, I claim but a common and conceded privilege. "An author's works (as you have yourself remarked\*) are public property. He who purchases may judge, and publish his opinion if he pleases." Generally speaking, indeed, we content ourselves with a silent judgment; but when the moral sense of mankind is attempted to be perverted, and their religious opinions and feelings are held up to contempt, a mere silent judgment can no longer be rested in. Our duty then runs in a higher form, and, where offence is crying, reprehension becomes virtuous.

That you have afforded but too just a field for severe discussion, even your warmest admirers

\* Preface to *Childe Harold*.

must admit. For my own part, I have not, I confess, been a regular peruser of your works. I have neither thought well enough of them, nor of your motives, so far as they could be discovered, in giving them to the public, to be very solicitous about the expected seasons of their appearance. You have probably written more than it has fallen to my lot to meet with. But I have read enough to convince me that had I seen and known less of them, I should have sustained no loss.

It is not my intention minutely to examine the grounds upon which the poetry of Lord Byron claims, and has been considered as deserving of its high reputation. Few will deny you the possession of genius, and none will wish to rob that genius of its reward. My views in the task I here impose upon myself are of another kind. It is the *immorality* of your writings that will constitute with me the chief theme of investigation. It is the deformity that attaches to you as a Christian and as a man. Yet I say not that I will debar myself in these strictures from such excursions, even of mere fancy, as may in any measure fall in with my main design; for I am not come solely to spy out the moral *nakedness of the land*, but to indulge in occasionally, and to exhibit the variety of its soil and the richness and exuberance of its productions.

I pledge myself to no formal division of the

course of such reflections as I may eventually be led into in taking up the volumes of your Lordship's poetry. I say this with more concern than I am willing to confess; but we are not the makers of our own minds and judgments, though it be our duty to improve them. It is a bad school that gives us matter without method; and in such a school I have, alas! learnt but too much of the little I can boast to know. Half a man's thoughts become refuse when they are not regulated, and that, I have reason to fear, will be found eminently to be the case with mine. Your Lordship, however, discursive in every sentiment and feeling of your soul, will not be the person to condemn me. Both you and myself must herein become amenable to a higher tribunal.

Permit me then, my Lord, in the first instance, and as a preparation for what may hereafter follow, cursorily to advert to the subjects of your earlier poems. It is necessary to do this, both because these are the works upon which, I conceive, much of your best fame is founded, and because I wish to shew that your present lost state of mind has not come suddenly upon you, but that from the very cradle of your genius you have forced your muse into the service of immorality. For, if I mistake not, in these earlier productions will be found the seeds of that full harvest of impiety and licentiousness



which flourishes with such vigour in your "Cain" and "Juan."

It will not be necessary, nor indeed am I able, to arrange such of your poems as I shall notice, in their precise order of time as to publication. I enter, I am aware, this field of discussion late and ignorant. I have access to no complete edition of them, and perhaps may now and then have fallen in with the most incorrect. I will advert to them, therefore, as they happen to come in detached parts to my hands. Taken in what order they may, they but too well serve the purpose for which I consent to refer to them; nor will any want of chronological arrangement injure either their character or my remarks upon them.

I am not, my Lord, very anxious about the fate of these remarks, which, so far as they justly may, I wish to be considered as extending to all poets of the same immoral description with yourself. I enquire not whether they will provoke your resentment or your disdain. It is by the opinion of the community that every writer must be weighed. It is for the benefit of the community that every writer should exert himself. If my labours answer no useful end, public neglect will soon dispose of them. But if in any measure they chance "to come home to men's business and bosoms;" if they contain in them any tendencies to, or capacities of pro-

ducing an antidote to the poison of such poetry, I shall have my reward ; nor, in that case, will I permit myself to be influenced by either danger to be apprehended, or contempt or injury to be sustained. A mind firm in the discharge of its duty fears no danger, and, if it be not deserved, feels no contempt.---I have done with prefacing.

Let us then, my Lord, go over together, though merely with a view of touching upon, the subjects of your earliest and best works. Of your poem of *Childe Harold*, which we will put at the head of this list, it is indeed difficult to say what does constitute the subject. Your hero is here, as you yourself term him, simply a convenient personage to connect the thread of your narrative. Through the instrumentality of this fictitious being, sentiments and feelings are thrown out upon the world, which, in its present unsettled state, there could be little need of, and which in any state of civilization must be highly injurious. The work is without method, nor can be said to have either plot, or fable, or a subsistence of any kind. Taking it through its various Cantos, it is at once descriptive and immoral ; full of beauty and infidelity ; occasionally enchanting in its pensiveness, but uniformly repulsive by its philosophy. There is scarcely a solitary recognition of virtue, as virtue, in any part of it. The *Childe* himself seems a compound of all the worst passions with which our human nature is afflicted under its warmest climates and its vilest characters. He

is bad in his religion, his morals, and his politics. There is about him much of disdain and harsh opinion of mankind; and his feelings, when called forth, are evidently of a mere ingraftment, and have nothing to do with the heart. You have infused into him, it is true, "a kind of illustrious depravity and majestic madness\*," but the genuine heroic spirit he is a stranger to. He delighteth in other sensations, and dwelleth among other objects.

Rich, my Lord, as in these Cantos are your descriptions of nature in every varied clime, you will yet not, I think, find Childe Harold an enduring performance. In vain is there magic in its beauties, grandeur in its sentiments, strength in its execution, and a restless, ceaseless energy in every part of it. Its magnificence is so overlaid with sins against both morals and genius, that it is impossible to peruse it, as works of immortality are perused, with unmixed and increasing pleasure. There is no enchantment in numbers, that will make up for positive deformity; nor are we willing to be wedded to works that set at defiance all which ought to be held sacred. A sort of ostentation of evil runs through the whole body of the performance. It is written with a wretched felicity to delight and corrupt in the same breath. You raise an Eden amid a perfect wilderness of all the finer feelings of the soul. Every figure on your stained canvass puts forth

\* Johnson's Life of Dryden.



the head of a syren and the tail of a scorpion. Beauty is joined with sin, and sin is rendered delightful ; nor does the young mind feel its error till it finds its ruin. From this censure, however, I must in justice exempt much of the last Canto that has come under my notice. Verses like these are not to be rejected because joined with strong and lamentable incongruities. They are to be held at their intrinsic value, and a well-regulated judgment will inform us what that value is.

You here and there indulge in allusions which we can hardly read without a smile. Surely calling for the *Ægis* of Pallas, and bustling up the Shade of Achilles to affright a noble Lord from taking away his marbles, is sufficiently ridiculous. It was an useful and a holy depredation, and may be defended on many grounds ; but on what ground shall we apologize for his inconsistency in descanting upon the violation of the Parthenon, whose sacrilegious numbers have so often violated mosques, temples, churches, altars, and every thing bearing the shadow of a likeness to sacred and ancient institutions ?

And yet, nothing daunted by this consciousness, have you the hardihood to observe, “The Parthenon, before its destruction in part, by fire during the Venetian siege, had been a temple, a church, and a mosque. In each point of view it is an object of regard. It changed its worshippers ; but still it was a place of worship thrice

sacred to devotion: its violation is a triple sacrilege."\*

In the wanderings of Childe Harold, you seem better to have preserved the scenery than the mind of our present European states. The libertinism of human nature, wherever found, you indeed paint with a pencil worthy of the subject; but the distinguishing characteristics of individual countries are lost amid that blaze of voluptuousness in which you involve every object. Your poem too, though long, is never didactic. You make your imaginary hero neither reflect nor teach to any good purpose. You remove him from place to place, not with the view of drawing forth what is estimable as he goes along, but in the vain effort of escaping reproachful recollections. In these excursions he sketches beautifully, it is true, the sceneries of Earth and the idolatries of Heaven: but, having done this, he feeds, like the progeny of sin, upon his own bowels; and falls back on those disgusting portraiture of self, which is evermore the narrow and primary object of his regard. It is impossible, therefore, to be sorry when the work is closed.

“ But where is he, the Pilgrim of my song,  
The being who upheld it through the past ?  
Methinks he cometh late and tarries long.  
He is no more—these breathings are his last ;  
His wanderings done, his visions ebbing fast,

\* Childe Harold, Canto ii. Note 2.

And he himself as nothing :—if he was  
 Aught but a phantasy, and could be class'd  
 With forms which live and suffer—let that pass—  
 His shadow fades away into Destruction's mass." \*

Yes, my Lord, but his soul remains; his infidelity; his immorality. All the dark passions of that soul he has left behind him for the formation of future Harolds and the affliction of future generations. We shall sooner forget the beauties of this poem than its criminality. The one will occasionally elicit our admiration; the other will perpetually corrupt our hearts.

Pass we on to *The Giaour, a Turkish Tale*. Here you have chosen a subject ill according with any chastised views of religion or morals. A female slave pays for her libidinous disposition with her life; and her paramour, a Christian in his creed, but a villain in his conduct, avenges one crime by the commission of another. Your hero throughout is a character composed of hardened and fiery feelings. He deliberately endangers the object of his love for the indulgence of his appetites, and, with a consciousness about him of the enormity of the offence, and of the just punishment that awaits it, would still seduce his mistress to the commission of that offence, and expose her to the severity of that punishment. It is, in short, a hateful story of passion determined upon gratification, though it wade through

\* Canto iv. S. 164.

blood. And surely no woman can be much elated by the conquest of a heart, that, in the agony of death, exults in the commission of his crime, and confesses, on the very brink of eternity, that for the pleasure of another such illicit indulgence he would again endure the bitterness and the shame. If this be not carrying a criminal passion to its most debauched and dreadful excess, in what page, my Lord, of history, Heathen or Mahometan, shall we search to find it?

This poem, I perceive, purposes to be merely the fragment of a Turkish tale. Extracts and fragments are, I think, held to be no parts of sound learning, or of true poetry. They rather tend to the depreciation of both. They afford an opportunity of choosing, or rejecting, at pleasure, what we will, and thus break into that regular order and governance of the thoughts which alone can insure an enduring performance. We can judge from an arm, or hand, or other costly relic, of the exquisite sculpture of the figure now dilapidated or lost; but it does not seem so plain that these Parnassian gems are proofs of the capacity of the poet for greater performances. It may rather, perhaps, intimate that he has concentrated his genius, and brought his powers to their apex, and that, were he to proceed further, the "*multa et præclara minantis*" would vanish, his images become stale, and his execution spiritless.



In *The Bride of Abydos*, another Turkish tale, the woes are sung of seductive love and parental disobedience; of meditated assassination and open violence; of murder on the one part, and rebellion on the other. Giaffir is a bad character, and I am afraid Selim can hardly pass for a good one. There is, however, and I remark it with pleasure, no prophaneness, no licentiousness in this little story. Prophaneness was, indeed, not called for; and happily the purity of Zuleika forbids any approach to wantonness of description. She is one of the most fascinating of your heroines, only because she is one of the most correct.

Still, over the purest of your female characters you contrive to cast some shade of suspicion that purity must wish away. You are not disposed to paint even a virtuous woman consistent in her virtue. You have represented Zuleika as binding herself to Selim by vows certainly not in consonance with their supposed consanguinity. Her promise never to bestow her hand without his consent, is a tacit acknowledgment that he may consider himself as the disposer of her affections. There is surely nothing in this very favourable to either her morals or her duty.

The relation of Selim in the second Canto is, I think, long and uninteresting. And though, altogether, this must be considered as a prime production of your pen, it yet confirms the opinion

very generally entertained, that the beauty of your Lordship's poetry is of more luxuriant growth when it takes root amid prophaneness and immorality. Where you are disposed to be virtuous, you are disposed to be tame. The *Bride of Abydos* will, however, live in the public estimation longer, probably, than most of your works. It had been well for your fame, as well as for society, had you oftener made these sacrifices to decorum. The poet would have lost nothing by it; the man would have gained every thing.

In *The Corsair*, you continue the same immoral cast of subject and character visible in the *Giaour*. Your hero, for the sake of plunder, leaves one mistress, brings back another whom he is obliged to abandon to her fate, and after the slaughter of a variety of persons, and the death of his heroine by neglect and distraction, renounces his piracies, and is no where to be found. I know not what the feeling approaches to, as we peruse this work. We are sorry to be delighted where we are so repeatedly insulted. Our taste here rebels against our reason. We are prone to admire those very outrages of common sense and common humanity, which we ought to shrink from and despise. Conrad, "linked with one virtue and a thousand crimes;" \* *Gulnare*, as cruel as *Lady Macbeth*, and as wanton as the wife of *Potiphar*, have yet not the power to detach us from the sweetness of

\* *Corsair*.

the poetry and the sorrows of Medora. But this is a poor praise, and weighs as nothing when we recollect that the mass of the poem is but a mass of corruption; the history of a man, or rather of a monster, whose mistress was "the only living thing he could not hate."\*

*Lara* falls short of none of the above poems in the subject which you have chosen, or in the sentiments with which you have invested it. It is the recitation of the return of a stranger from foreign climes, covered with mysterious delinquencies and distresses. Here you deal in the same dark doings of mind visible in all your works; in the same scorn and pride of heart and infidelity of spirit. *Lara*, indeed, I should term one of your most finished characters of baseness. He treads the earth at once a misanthrope and a murderer; an assassin that without honour takes away life from others, and without a pause of penitence, or a glimmering of faith, sinks, amid the slaughter of his fellow-creatures, into death himself.

That the poem has beauties, and of a high form, may not be denied. That it has pathos in a certain degree, and powers of description rarely surpassed, all, I think, must acknowledge. But there is a horror about it that chills the blood; a dark, sullen, cruel cast of soul in its hero, which, in spite of its attractions, deliver it over

\* Corsair.

to reprobation. Even the fidelity of Kaled preserves in the mind of the reader no spark of affection for Lara. Even her constancy of soul redeems not the poem from the neglect that must await an unmixed recital of murder, of impenitence, and of despair.

*The Siege of Corinth* is drawn with a powerful pencil, but upon a baleful principle. Here we have for the subject a renegade who renounces his country, seeks the hand of a maiden against the consent of her parent, joins himself to the adversaries of her faith, fights against her father, and, finally, perishes at the very moment when life, or death, is alike become an object of his indifference. Throughout there is a fearless display of infidelity; a worthless renunciation of patriotism; an insulting defiance of all that makes up the practical religion of the human heart. Alp has a boundless, ferocious valour, but he has nothing in the world besides. His love is weak compared with his thirst for revenge; and the apparition of Francesca, full of those cold and shrouded beauties that mark a disembodied state, and with every solemnity of incidence to give effect to her endeavours, labours his conversion in vain.

*Parisina* is a poem of a description, I am sorry to say, still more revolting. Here are celebrated the loves of two guilty personages; the one false to her husband's honour, the other



violating the bed of his parent. The decapitation of the latter and the distraction of the former wind up the incestuous tragedy.

In this work your Lordship may be said to have given a presage of what you afterwards, with higher powers of mischief, perfected in *Don Juan*. *Parisina* may be considered as a voluptuous miniature sketch of that more finished Satanic picture. It is a piece which horror, wantonness, and impiety, share between them. There is, indeed, no lengthened portraiture of ungovernable affection; no dwelling upon it in its seductive forms as it unconsciously approaches the very brink of criminality. One tumultuous moment of burning guilt, and all is silent and resigned suffering. All in *Parisina* is sorrow without expression, and agony without complaint. It is a rapidly passing scene of most pernicious tendency, calculated in its design to excite abhorrence, but in its execution so abounding in energy and so rich in enchantment, as to extort the praise we almost feel it a sin upon our conscience to bestow. *Hugo* and *Parisina* are the very instruments of corruption which a politic brain, defying Heaven and futurity would lay hold of to corrupt with the direst effect. But, alas! these are with you no infertile subjects. Perfectly indigenous to the soil, they spring forth and flourish in their native bed. Care they need none; cultivation none. "Plough

but the furrows, and the fruits arise ;” and they arise too of the blackest growth, and of the deadliest poison. It is not seduction in its hurried, raptured, surprised moment that you paint ; or in its gay, loose, libidinous dress ; or in its slow, subtle, cautious, calculating gradations. But it is lust with horror ; love with abomination ; adultery with incest : the father’s bed defiled by his own flesh and blood, and the crime absolvable but by dipping his hands and wringing his soul in the execution of his own flesh and blood. It is, in short, virtue demolished in every thought of the heart, and sin concentrated in every portion of the deed.

The depravity manifested in this little poem is greater than can well be conceived by those who merely take it up for the purpose of delighting themselves in its imagery. Could it be suspected, my Lord, by any of your readers, that the discovery of the guilt of an adulteress by an injured husband, would give rise to one of the most daringly prophane comparisons that ever entered the breast of man ?

“ He clasp’d her sleeping to his heart, ;  
 And listen’d to each broken word :  
 He hears—Why doth Prince Azo start,  
 As if the Archangel’s voice he heard ?  
 And well he may—a deeper doom  
 Could scarcely thunder o’er his tomb,  
 When he shall wake to sleep no more  
 And stand the eternal throne before.” \*

\* Parisina, vi.

He who would venture upon an illustration so impious, of a deed so depraved, can surprise no one by any of his after-productions. It is a preparation for criminality of thought, be it of as deep and demoniac a die as it may. Who does not admire this solemn and sublime allusion? Who does not shudder at its application? Few could have given to the distracting circumstance such a beauty; none could have imparted to it such a flagitiousness.\*

*The Prophecy of Dante* may rank with the *Bride of Abydos*, as one of the least objectionable of your works. There is an equability of strength and fire running through the whole of it; and though it differs considerably in many points from both of your proposed models†, and still

\* Shakespear has in one instance, I am sorry to observe, fallen into a somewhat similar prophane comparison.

“ He was a King, blest of the King of Kings.  
Unto the French, the dreadful Judgment day  
So dreadful will not be as was his sight.”

(First Part of Henry VI. Act I. Scene I.)

But here evident extenuations will not fail to offer themselves to the considerate mind; while, in the instance above alluded to, all attempt at extenuation is fruitless. We concede, however, to Lord Byron the benefit of the apology, such as it is.

† “ In adopting this plan,” (says Lord Byron,) “ I have had in my mind the Cassandra of Lycophron and the Prophecy of Nereus by Horace, as well as the prophecies of Holy Writ.” The Cassandra of Lycophron has, I think, been more closely imitated in other parts of his Lordship’s voluminous works, and where, though he is sufficiently extravagant, he neither

more from the inspirations of holy writ, we may yet say of the beauty of many of its incidents, "these things are not made for forgetfulness." Your picture of Italy in the second canto, and your praise of sculpture and painting in the fourth, let them have found their way into the poem through what suspected channels they may, are certainly of the most finished cast, and will be read by all, will please all, and be remembered by all. While the mind is entranced amid such efforts of the muse, as rival in beauty the very ideal forms of perfection she describes, we consider not how many artists have contributed to produce the glowing picture, or which of them has the foremost claim to originality.

"The kindled marble's bust may wear  
 More poesy upon its speaking brow  
 Than aught less than the Homeric page may bear;  
 One noble stroke with a whole life may glow,  
 Or deify the canvass till it shine  
 With beauty so surpassing all below,  
 That they who kneel to idols so divine  
 Break no commandment, for high Heaven is there  
 Transfused, transfigured."\*

The Venetian story of *Beppo* is cast in the same Paphian mould with your other productions, and comes forth with the same Satanic *image and*

so well connects disjointed things, nor so truly copies nature in the character of his frenzy. It would be well for society, were the ravings of the modern poet as little regarded in our times, as the divinations of the unfortunate prophetess were in hers.

\* Canto iv.



*superscription.* Laura, the heroine, is represented as

——“ A woman of the strictest principle,  
So much as to be thought almost invincible;”

and, of course, an object the more worthy to be seduced into sin and misery. To say that it is in the style of Juan, and partakes largely of its indecent allusions to religion, mixed with that voluptuous sort of description which, while mortality is clothed in flesh and blood, cannot but deeply tempt our unfixed virtues, may be sufficiently to draw the character of this poem. For elegant seduction it is all that it ought to be. It disgusts not by its coarseness: it shocks not by its brutality: it terrifies not by its impiety. Its meditations of mischief are of a different cast. It envelopes its purposes of destruction in its powers of enchantment. It aims its ridicule at virtuous decorum, and it rarely misses its mark. “ O mirth and innocence! O milk and water!” Conviviality this upon a very insipid scale indeed, for a muse so habitually inebriated, as to be untouched by any thing short of the proof spirit of lewdness. Nothing must be brought into your poetical slaughterhouse for immolation but youth and purity; youth that has scarcely seen the sun, and purity that has never known a stain. The Devil himself, in Milton, had moments of repentance; but the muse of Lord Byron—a wary, collected speculator upon mental demo-

ralization ; a cold-blooded assassin of virtue, let her inhabit what chaste and sacred mansions she may—has none. She trusts to her numbers for the reception of her principles, and smiles and blasts in the same breath.

*Mazeppa*, a poem of the wildest cast, will not shame those powers of libidinous description in which your Lordship so delights to excel. “Rem tibi Socraticæ poterunt ostendere chartæ!” No, no. It is in the bowers of Venus, not in the philosophy of Socrates, that we must seek for the subjects of your muse. The story is short and voluptuous. Here the song intended to take captive the heart, dwells upon the fierce extremes of love ; the love of a ruffian for an adulteress. Theresa is made up of the same pliant materials with the common run of your females ; and as in *Parisina* and *Beppo* you offend against Heaven itself, so here you again mix impiety with lasciviousness, and make futurity, with all its hopes and fears, a matter of mere nerves.

“Theresa’s fate I never knew.”---No, my Lord, nor did the wretch ever care to know. The seducer is the last person in the world to waste a single thought on his unfortunate victim. The tenderness of memory, wherever it may turn, alas ! never turns upon her. Though her own heart break, be assured it will give no pang to his. How should it, when *Mazeppa*, hoary in wickedness and grey with years, is made to repeat the abandoned wish of your *Giaour*, that he

might be permitted to live his life over again, again to indulge in his adulteries and his crimes! This is the proper demoniac feeling that cleaves to such a soul through life, through death; that shrouds with the villain in his very grave, and is destined, when he rises from it, to depart with him to his own place. And who, my Lord, has so admirably painted these feelings as yourself? Who so chained down his genius in their service? That, poetically considered, you have made the most of your bad subject, I confess. You have bordered it about with manifold beauties, and garnished with the flowers of the spring, the dish on which you serve up the limbs of Pelops. We feast and loath, and loath and feast again; not apparently knowing, or not regarding, that to these "devils" of your hot imagination, we may, long before our sun is gone down, be called upon to "sacrifice our sons and our daughters."

And here, by the way, suffer me to observe how animated are your Lordship's portraitures of the *malicious* heart. This wretch, who in many circumstances seems to be but Harold and the fraternity revived, rejoices in his unquenchable thirst for vengeance.

"And if we do but watch the hour,  
There never yet was human power  
Which could evade, if unforgiv'n,  
The patient search and vigil long  
Of him who treasures up a wrong."\*

\* Mazeppa.

Thank God! this is the Italian, not the noble English sentiment. It is the lesson you have learnt abroad; it was never taught you in your own beloved country, where, whatever may be our party feelings, we alike abominate feelings of this nature, and where every page of British history still glows with British gallantry and forgiveness.

Of your minor productions, a few of which I shall beg leave to advert to before I proceed to your Dramas, it may be observed, that they, for the most part, speak the language and breathe the spirit of their elder progeny. *The Prisoner of Chillon* is, indeed, free from impiety and ribaldry. The foundation of the poem would not admit of any unholy revellings in these perversions of genius. It bespeaks a partiality for republican governments and opinions, but such as may well consist with virtue, where they are virtuously entertained and conscientiously acted upon for the public good, a hard trial of man's infirm nature in any days but those of the most decided purity and patriotism. As a whole, however, this poem imposes a heavy burden on our feelings. It deals too much in the exhibition of scenes of suffering, and sights of pain, and "horrible imagining." These, when they arrest and occupy attention, leave nothing to be regretted when such a poem is finished. The mind cannot go with unearthly delineations where the com-



mon ground of all its passions and propensities, of its hopes and fears, is entirely cut away.

Yet one praise has been here, I believe, pretty generally accorded you. The Prisoner of Chillon is considered as the most original production of your pen. It is supposed to have less of borrowed thought and imagery, less of that peculiar expression about it which marks an identification, in many of your other works, with contemporary or departed genius. Standing more, therefore, on its own insulated merits, it will be a fairer criterion of the real powers of your poetry, and will go down to posterity with a more genuine reputation.

The next ground you take is a very imprudent one, and far too holy to be defiled by so unholy a muse. The *Hebrew Melodies* is an attempt to clothe sacred poetry in a more beautiful garb than its own. We cannot do it. Vida, in his "Christiad," has afforded no encouragement to such vain hopes. He has made it neither sublime nor pious, neither a help to the study of Christianity, nor an incitement. It is a poem dull, and heavy, and feeble throughout, with nothing to compel applause, and hardly any thing to insure patience. Nor has his more modern follower fared much better. The "Calvary" of Cumberland will be read, as every thing coming from such a pen must be; but no friend to his fame will ever wish it to be brought to the ordeal

of severe criticism. Heber's "Palestine" is silently passing away. The truth is, Holy Scripture, to the mere English reader, speaks so well in no language as its own. What we add to it diminishes its value. What we take from it has the same effect. What we change in it, we are almost certain to change for the worse. Its vernacular elegance is not to be surpassed, nor from its native bed can we transplant its sublime conceptions. We might as well dream of latinizing Homer and preserving his spirit. Even Addison, with all his moral requisites for the undertaking, so far as he dared to adventure on these awful themes, has failed; a circumstance the less to be wondered at when Milton, with far mightier powers, could barely keep his genius from sinking, though borne in her flight.

"Upon the seraph wings of ecstasy."

To add that Lord Byron too has been unsuccessful, is to tell but half his disgrace. You have fallen below Addison; below mediocrity. You barely keep your head above the surface with Sternhold and Hopkins, and Brady and Tate. Indeed there is scarcely a stave in the collection which these poetical compeers would feel any pride in adopting. In this compartment you seem altogether out of your element. The fire of your genius smoulders away when you approach these awful subjects. Your strength withers when you employ it on this *rock of ages*.

There is, in truth, such a miserable *leanness in the soul* of these Melodies, that you no longer appear to us as a poet. You are a mere versifier, a doer of the Psalms of David into English calculated to undo all the devout impressions we have received from them. And if, as hath been observed, “the Hebrew idioms run into the English tongue with a particular grace and beauty \*,” you are the more inexcusable for having imparted so little beauty and grace to them.

One solitary spark alone remains to convince us that these songs are really the offspring of your Lordship’s muse, that tendency to wanton description, which not even the *Hill of Zion* and the *Sanctuary in ruins* have power altogether to extinguish so long as the *daughters of Jerusalem* stand before you in their fascinations. It is to be regretted that this beautiful portion of Holy Writ should so moderately have been translated by various pens at various times, and that these labours should only have tended to disgust whom they were designed to delight. But that the records of our faith should find their solemnity insufficient to save them from the sacrilege to which they are *here* doomed, is more than a subject of lamentation; it is an insult alike to our religion and our taste.

Yet how should it be otherwise when these records fall into hands so little touched by devo-

\* Spectator, vol. vi. No. 405.

tional feelings as to “rhyme and revel with the dead,” and “madly play with his forefather’s bones” almost in the literal sense of the distracting suggestion. Your Lordship’s *Lines inscribed upon a Cup formed from a Skull*, are a disgrace to your muse, and, though some have looked upon them as a high effort of genius, must be considered as disgustingly prophane and insolently brutal. Such a cup, though not, it seems, entirely the invention of your own fancy, has traits of horror about it which no fancy, save your own, could have had the power or the heart to have given it. The verses are the fabrication of a mind that, wearied with stale and common offences, would carry pollution into the very grave itself. Here we have a poet, bearing the form and character of a human being, that can assimilate with things dreadful and holy, sentiments of ribaldry and looseness; that can jest upon mortality in its most solemn vestment; that can associate with bacchanalian ideas and gross allusions a theme, which, of all others that man is acquainted with, is most fitted for the extinguishment of such ideas; that can contemplate a relic of our decayed and departed nature, which should cut out of his soul the whole body of licentiousness at once, and terrify him into repentance, not only with no abatement of this sin, but with a prepared resolution to delight in and to deepen it. This is, indeed, in its most perverted sense, an



*awful mirth.* Gracious God ! that a wretch should be found so hardened to the feelings of futurity as to sport with what should shake him from the strong holds of his prophaneness ; with what, in his retired moments, when man talks with his Maker, should calmly speak to him of all the errors in his past, and all the crimes in his present conduct ; of that penitence which the Almighty demands, and of that punishment which his justice denounces ! Lines like these are an equal violation of the genius of the poet and of the faith of the Christian. They originate in a stupid, hardened, proud perverseness of soul ; the effusion of one, who, forgetful of the rebuke of a lost but lofty mind,—

“ I dare do all that may become a man ;

Who dares do more, is none---”\*

voluntarily renounces his nature, and is content to be considered as any thing but a man.

Of your *Address on the opening of Drury Lane Theatre*, the admirers of your poetry will do well to be silent. It is the work of Lord Byron, not in his “ hours of idleness,” but in his moments of dotage. It is a proof upon record, and a more melancholy one was never exhibited, of the dotage of all parties. A thing of greater vanity and vacancy never issued from the press. The competition between rival candidates must have been of the most miserable description for this

\* Macbeth.

poor, puling brat to have carried off the prize. The bare acceptance of such a prologue, on such an occasion, would have been sufficiently disgraceful---but to crown it with laurel—O Midas, Midas! how hast thou been belied!

Did your Lordship at the time recollect Dr. Johnson's lines on a somewhat similar occasion? Did you recollect them, and not blush to set this gilded gingerbread booby by the side of that majestic figure, conscious as you must have been that there would inevitably lie a competition between them; between one of the noblest and one of the dullest efforts of poetry; between an address that identified itself with the genius which it celebrated, and a motley, mawkish gallimawfrey that all genius, save that of the Thespian Synod, must have been ashamed of? You had this deification of Shakespear before you, and yet ventured your own. You compared, no doubt, their thoughts, their imagery, their spirit, their language. You did all this, and, in the face of all this, presented your "Address on the opening of Drury Lane Theatre!" The conclusion admits of no comment, that, as a modest estimator of your own talents, does not overwhelm you with confusion.

From this frothy, ephemeral production, which, like Brady's translation of the Eneid, that, "when dragged into the world, did not live long enough to cry," will probably soon find its grave in its

contempt, I turn with pleasure, so far as its poetry is concerned, to your *Monody on the Death of the Right Hon. R. B. Sheridan*, spoken at the same theatre, and worthy in the sublimity of its numbers, of the eloquent and sublime mind whose unhappy decadency it at once laments and immortalizes. But leaving the composition to answer for itself, as it well may, permit me to observe, that in these lines is but too visible a dangerous apology for Mr. Sheridan's immoral conduct; an apology which, carried to those lengths you here insist upon, might prove injurious to the necessary distinction between virtue and vice. Speaking of this gentleman's deviation, in the latter part of his life, from the wisdom that had before, in a good degree, insured his repute, and adverting to those to whom the mind in its ruins "yields a base delight," you exclaim—

———"Ah! little do they know

That what to them seem'd vice, might be but woe."

My Lord, we must not consent to be so imposed upon—we must not be tempted from our safe and useful rule of judging of the tree by its fruit. It would be destructive of every speculation upon morals were we to do otherwise. Abstractedly considered, it may, perhaps, little concern society from what cause an unrighteous conduct springs. It is the conduct itself which does the injury, and which must, therefore, be reprobated and repressed. Were we to adduce

a case somewhat, perhaps, in point; were we to listen to your own frequent complainings throughout your works of woes, and miseries, and blighted prospects, and hopes eradicated, and a whole host of sufferings, of which, however, you very prudently conceal the moving cause, we might be persuaded, in our moments of admiration or pity, to pardon your offences against public decorum. We might resolve the blasphemy of Cain into "a rooted sorrow," no otherwise to be "plucked from the memory," and the licentiousness of Juan into a mere physical effort to

"Cleanse the foul bosom of that perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart."\*

But we have no precedent for a moral casuistry of this kind. The evil spread over community in its nakedness, must in its nakedness be attacked, and, if possible, eradicated. Though, therefore, we are far from wishing to "track the steps of glory to the grave," we must yet not suffer a spirit of unrestrained indulgence to call itself by that illustrious name, or to become entitled to our grateful recollections. You might as well confound the distinction between arts and sciences, between speculation and practice, as to palm upon us the conduct proceeding from a corruption of the mind, for the effects produced by the irregularity of its powers. While we have

\* Macbeth.



before us so many noble examples to the contrary, in both ancient and modern times, we can never subscribe to the maxim, that Genius owes its moral depravities "half to the ardour which its birth bestows." The deduction converted into a canon of criticism, would be horrible.

Your celebrated little effusion, *Fare thee well!* the last I shall advert to, is, perhaps, best commended by speaking the least about it. It must not be suffered to offer itself for discussion. It approaches the confines of your domestic joys and sorrows, and we can only regret that such happiness as Providence seemed to have laid up in store for you, should, by whatever means, or through whatever instrumentality, have been so cruelly blighted. Its pathos will win many a silent, lonely heart that is suffering with "those that they see suffer." I lament that this fine poem should have been given to the world under circumstances that render it too probable it may be doomed to "waste its sweetness on the desert air." It is a poem, however, that is destined, I suspect, to tell heavily against you, on a ground which I forbear to take, but which, if an estimate can be formed of human feelings under excruciating circumstances, will leave you in a situation, where, to be merely "seared in heart, and lone, and blighted," is to be comparatively in Elysium.

Having thus taken such notice of your earlier

poems as I have deemed necessary, let us now proceed to what in courtesy, I suppose, we must designate your Dramatic performances. I shall touch but upon a few of them, and these such as I have been able more easily to meet with. Here, upon a very cursory inspection, we shall find that you have, perhaps, rather changed the form of evil than impaired its spirit; that you have moved the passions more, but have not injured virtue less; and that, upon the whole, you have increased our baser propensities, without increasing either the strength to withstand, or the power to repel them.

I know not the order of these compositions, and will begin, therefore, with *The Two Foscari*. In this play there is much of powerful painting; much that pathetically goes to the heart, and fetches up from it honourable feelings. Still there is the same family likeness, the blood of the Satanic muse running drowsily through its veins. There is unbelief dressed out in its usual garments, and, occasionally, the same occult system of divinity, the same heavy darkness of painting that we shall see made use of in the *Mystery of Cain*. The character of Marina is, I think, ably drawn, and is, in many parts of it, an exception to your usual female portraits. But, though of an heroic spirit, the taint is upon her. She is made the wild advocate of liberty, abusing, like Carlile's wife, and nearly in the same slang, the judges, ministers, and potentates of

the realm. Constantly she palsies her claim upon our pity by the incoherence and violence of her rebukes; and we should more have compassionated her sufferings and admired her fidelity, had these sufferings been borne with greater resignation, and that fidelity been evinced by a higher and a calmer dignity.

*The Doge of Venice*, a historical tragedy in five acts, is a very long, and not a very happy production of your pen, considering you had taken four years duly to meditate upon it.\* It ought to have come out a lovelier and a more genuine offspring. Its beauties are limited to its descriptions, but its defects spread through the whole. The Doge himself is an insufferably tedious and tautological character; and his egotism so runs out upon all subjects as to tire the reader, and, I should have thought, the very author too. But there is no calculating, it seems, the degree of self-complacency when we are employed in shadowing out our own dignified turn of mind, and presenting it, in various hues and under different Protean shapes, to an admiring world. This great man, wherever he is, or on whatever topic engaged, talks treason, and afterwards convicts himself of his crime. The poorest arguments are put into his mouth, and the vilest conduct into his heart. A stain upon the honour of the female character, (a cha-

\* See Preface to this play.

racter that in few of your writings your Lordship has suffered to escape without stain,) is here made the pretext for a conspiracy which has for its object the murder of the whole Venetian Senate; and so entirely does this principle of revenge take possession of the Doge's soul, that he actually dies with the denunciation of the whole body quivering on his lips; "I leave my curse on her, and hers for ever!"

Wantonness, to be sure, in this play there is none. With calculations of rebellion, blood, and murder, such a feeling would have been out of its element. The character of Angiola is mild, and pure, and almost perfect. But you endow her with a wordy and somewhat elaborate speech in her last interview with her husband—certainly not the most seasonable time for it—where she is made to go through the very same course of *erudite* history which you had yourself flourished upon before in your preface; and once more it is found expedient to put into requisition the rape of Helen, the death of Achilles, the expulsion of Tarquin, the sack of Rome, and the firing of Persepolis, as lessons of instruction—

"To wretches how they tamper, in their spleen,  
With beings of a higher order."

Somewhat unfortunately, however, these higher orders of beings are, throughout the play, represented in the person of the Doge, as them-



selves unceasingly tampering with all the factious plebeians that can be got together, by any crooked artifices, in the republic of Venice. But consistency is not your Lordship's strong ground.

The next drama I shall notice is in subject, in character, in sentiment, a very objectionable one. In *Sardanapalus* we have a debauched and impious sovereign giving himself up to the low gratifications of sense, and leaving the rule of his dominions to whatever hands may choose to usurp it. Throughout the play, strikingly beautiful as are detached parts of the poetry, there is a perpetual hostility to all established institutions, civil and religious, and a perpetual insult of all established modes of belief. A comparison is here drawn between a life of sensuality and of military glory, which, with a weak and unmanly sophistry, resolves the former into true enjoyment and the latter into oppression and murder. With a total disregard of dramatic justice, *Sardanapalus*, sunk in vicious indulgence, is made an object of admiration, and the palm of heroic suffering is taken from the faithful wife to be bestowed upon the wanton paramour. The Greek girl Myrrha dies with her lord, while Zerina the queen, whose affection is only inferior to her misfortunes, is dismissed, after nearly persuading her brutal and indifferent husband to relent and become a man.

Here too, as in Mazeppa—for these *bitter waters of Marah*, in which you so much delight, you can draw genuine from no fount like your own—we have the sentiments and feelings of the Giaour over again. While Myrrha makes a libation to the gods in her last moments, Sardanapalus, with revolting ideas of the marriage state, makes his to the recollection of his past sensualities; and, with an expiring insult of sacred persons and things, dies with the appropriate feelings such conduct and opinions are calculated to create.

——— “ For the future, 'tis  
In the hands of the Deities, if such there be;  
I shall know soon.”

Dead and putrid carcases, we are told, turn by degrees into respirable air; but what process of nature or of art shall ever convert the poison of such sentiments into wholesome nourishment? One of the Cato-street gang, (a butcher) executed with Thistlewood, made, I think, a somewhat similar demonstration of his faith; but I cannot take upon me to say whose was the original thought. The offal had perhaps better be divided between you.

Of *Manfred*, I confess, I know not what to say, or how to characterize it, so small a portion is there of it convertible into common sense. It is a wild, incomprehensible work; a drama that disdains dramatic form, and is unintelligible to any powers of reason that mere mortality is

gifted with. It sullenly indeed sets all acknowledged rules at defiance. It has, correctly speaking, neither beginning, middle, nor end. We know not what action is imitated in the fable, what manners distinguish the personages, or what sentiments individualize the characters. The scene and the subject are equally out of nature. Human feelings and sympathies have little to do with this redoubtable hero. He is no man for our common-place world. A mere earthly pollution of mind and morals is an object below his especial regard. He seems determined to carry the powers of seduction among other beings, and into the confines of other dominions. The consort of Pluto is hardly safe from the wiles of this Giovanni. The very spirits and shadows of created being, trapped out in I know not what mantlings of temptation unfelt by flesh and blood, must undergo the solicitations of their amalgamated half-disembodied, half-carnal adorer.

It was said of Dryden, that "he delighted to tread upon the brink of meaning, where light and darkness begin to mingle; to approach the precipice of absurdity, and hover over the abyss of unideal vacancy."\* Your Lordship here seems ambitious of working after the same model, and of letting yourself loose upon the realms of nonsense. How far the example of so illustrious a prototype may bear you out, I know not; but

\* Johnson's Life of Dryden.

whoever can read the drama of *Manfred*, and acknowledge no feeling of this "unideal vacancy" in its pages, must have a finer conception of the sublime and beautiful than ever entered the mind of man, formed, strengthened, and instructed after the usual manner of men.

Johnson, in his admirable preface to the plays of Shakespear, remarks, that "it will not easily be imagined how much he excels in accommodating his sentiments to real life;" and adds, that "the Theatre under any other direction is peopled by such characters as were never seen, conversing in a language that was never heard, upon topics which will never arise in the commerce of mankind." How much do these reflections go to the condemnation of *Manfred*, and of the whole of his heterogeneous train that make "no approaches to the possibilities of real life," and among whom there is not a single sentiment, incident, or situation, that assimilates itself with any of the known feelings of mankind. If, therefore, it was "the praise of Shakespear that his drama is the mirror of life," and that "he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language," it must surely be your Lordship's disgrace, that, in such mysterious productions, whether narrative or dramatic, as you have been pleased to pour forth upon your afflict-



ed country, nature, religion, morality, are all entirely renounced, and nothing offered for public edification, but characters that, it is to be hoped, never existed, sentiments that were never entertained, and feelings that were never experienced.

But you have, it seems, a poor opinion of the dramatic barbarian, and may not, therefore, readily stand convicted of error by so insufficient an appeal. We have no better standard to try your works of this nature by. Pope—your great poet, “whom the surviving world would snatch from the wreck, and let the rest sink with the people,”\*—Pope wrote no tragedies. We smile at the vanity of these opinions. But Shakespear’s fame will suffer no reproach from being undervalued by Lord Byron. His plays and your dramas do, indeed, “differ in dignity;” nor is it any wonder that the trammelled composer of the one should be incapable of estimating the wild and mighty powers of the other. Compare them—What! Hyperion with a Satyr? Why, we should be crazier than your own Manfred to sully the mind with only a thought of such comparison. Plato, we know, fancied himself at one time a poet, as you have been cockered up to believe yourself a tragedian. But the philosopher, conscious that he could never enter the field with Homer, prudently committed his effusions to the flames— Plato was a wise man.

\* Lord Byron’s Letter to Mr. Bowles.

These, my Lord, are the whole of your voluminous works that I intend, in the present Letter, to advert to. There are others which I have not seen, and some which, I suspect, I have not so much as heard of. But I have got abundantly enough for my purpose, and it now only remains, following the scope of my design, to offer such remarks upon them, considered in their general character and tendency, as they seem to call for.

In the first place, then, give me leave to observe, that a great defect, and, poetically considered, an inexpressible one, independent of more serious objection, runs through the entire body of these poems. It must be evident, on the slightest inspection, that a gross *sameness* pervades the libidinous mass. Your impieties and ribaldries; your sneers, and jests, and gibes, are scions of a common stock. Out of one quiver you shoot every arrow; and every arrow dipped in the same poison. Indeed, there is such an identity in these "thick coming" compositions, that having read one of your poetical incentives to immorality, we have read all. One soul shines out in Greece, in Spain, in Italy, in whatever beautiful clime your heroes blast by their presence. Amid a great variety of personages and incidents, the main work is yet going on every where alike. There is a certain quantity of loose prophaneness, the staple commodity; a floating mass of offensive matter which is taken up, in crude and hasty

portions, by every character as it passes. When Harold drops off, we find his evil genius revived in the Giaour; and when the Giaour expires, it springs from his ashes, and, gathering fresh life, performs its transmigrations through the Corsair, the Renegade, and the whole crew of worthies issuing from the same prolific bed. Like the careful mother\* who obtained that the spirit of one departed son should infuse itself into and strengthen the living principle of the other, you invest your successive heroes with each others' crimes, until, in Cain and Juan, they attain to the fulness of their measure.

Here, where Genius should shew itself in one of its finest qualities, it shrinks into imbecility. Homer particularly surpassed in his varied and accurate delineation of character. "Every God that is admitted into his poem, acts a part which would have been suitable to no other deity. His princes are as much distinguished by their manners as by their dominions; and even those among them whose characters seem wholly made up of courage, differ from one another as to the particular kinds of courage in which they excel."† He also, the same writer tells us, "does not only outshine all other poets in the variety, but also in the novelty of his characters."‡ But you, my Lord, have to boast of nothing of

\* Faery Queene. Book iv. Canto ii.

† Spectator, No. 273. ‡ Id.

the sort. You neither surprise us with new portraitures of the human mind, nor with any variations of the old. You neither bring to your poems the aid of such a variety of characters as is to be found in the world ; nor do you attempt to diversify the usual produce of human nature by the invention of such as are not. On the contrary ; any sentiment uttered by one hero will come as appropriately from the mouth of another. All of them may change speeches with little or no violation of their mental costume. Their distinguishing qualities may be promiscuously cast into a bag, and it matters not which of them make the first choice : he is sure to be fitted, whether he fish out his own particular enormities or not. For, according to your Lordship's Pythagorean process, differently embodied we have the individual spirit still. The Satanic feature begins with Harold, and passes through " the honoured file." They are all clothed in the same mysterious garments ; all entertain the same abhorrent sentiments ; all act the same unprincipled parts ; and, to avoid the terrors of a retributive justice, are all consigned to the same protecting annihilation.

And this sameness obtains even where we should have supposed the field wide enough to have avoided it. It takes place in nearly every, and in the very best parts of your works ; in the presumptive delineations of your own propen-



sities ; in the more sober train of your reflections ; in your descriptions of the varied and lovely face of Nature ; and in the portraitures, exquisite as they many of them are, of the charms of woman. In this latter instance especially, we shall perceive a lamentable repetition of ideas and images ; a lascivious display of the female figure, with a total nakedness and precocity of the female mind. The rule of your poetical statuary is fixed. All your heroines are beautiful, and all your beauties are libidinous. The drapery is indeed elegantly folded, and the form from the chisel of Phidias ; but evermore some demon or other infuses into them the soul of the Seraglio, so that they are drawn in the colours of Heaven wastefully and to no purpose. Even where they chance to escape pollution from your pencil, you leave them characters of sand ; and we are at liberty to contemplate the Zuleikas, the Kaleds, and the Medoras—confessedly among the fairest offspring of your fancy—almost in any light we please.

It is, in fact, corporeal charm alone that shines out with you Love's guiding star ; a perfect soulless character ; a Venus rising from the sea, or reposing on her Paphian couch, compacted of elements that make up the paradise of Mahomet. With a familiar accommodation to Eastern manners, your protestations are addressed to flowing tresses, ruddy lips, and blooming cheeks.

“Hear my vow before I go.

*Zōē mē, sas āgapō.*” \*

Thus it is that you woo your “Maid of Athens,” and in this language do you express your regard for every maiden of every country. But what woman of honour will thank you for such insulting compliments to her charms? The “ribald Steno” is not more abhorrent to her feelings. You disgust while you adore. You distress while you praise, and you praise but to distress. The Arnaout song is, with you, the song of the heart; “*Qurmini dua civileni Roba ‘si siarmi tilāi eni.*”† I may not, my Lord, disguise the truth. The “cinders,” the “bunch of flowers,” and the “pebble‡;” in other words, the Haram’s love and the Musulman’s lust, are, I fear, alone declarative of the nature of your affection towards any woman. Can she desire a grosser adorer, a viler deification?

This libidinous sameness is alike disgraceful to the powers of your understanding and of your muse. The genius of our best poets has been emulous to describe human nature in her perpetually varied attitudes of mind. Voluptuousness is rarely drawn by them with such a pencil that you can say their idolatries are of the same standard, and must be worshipped with the same rites. How correctly are the various personages

\* Poems, Song vii. † Harold, Canto ii. Note 30.

‡ Poems, Note 3.

depicted in Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." His pilgrims, as they pass in review, are all true to nature, and yet all essentially different from each other. They shew the effects of their education in the unequal endowment of their understandings and the diversified feelings of their souls. They are family likenesses of the times; the people of their own particular age; but abounding, as every age must, in dissimilarity of manners, persons, humours, hearts, and souls. It was a fine field the poet had before him, and he has delightfully expanded it to our view. He has led us through every part of the changing scenery, and to every part he has given interest by giving accuracy. It is one varied moving picture of decayed manners and departed persons.

If you say that your subjects required you to fall into this sameness of character; that your heroes being all villains, and villains from the cradle to the grave, it was necessary to paint them in an uniform blackness of heart; I answer, that inferior artists certainly might find it necessary, but that the fire of genius would, under even these confined boundaries, strike out some diversity of feature. Where there are neither hopes nor fears, compunction nor belief, certainly all the remorseful workings of the soul are lost to the poet; all the impassioned feelings balancing between high ambitions and daring crimes; between thirst for vengeance and dread

of punishment. But still something, perhaps much, is left. Our great Poet of Nature has, like yourself, furnished us, amid those varieties incident to *the children of men*, with a host of villains. Even these opprobrious characters, however, he has not exhibited after the same dull, monotonous manner. Macbeth and Iago are essentially different. Edmund, a thoroughpaced villain, is distinguished from both. Angelo is a hypocritical villain, and so are Claudius, the usurping King of Denmark, and his courteous instruments Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. But in every play where the evil mind is necessary to be drawn, it is so delineated that the personages are as distinct as an exhibition of the different vices and crimes of human nature can make them. *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.* Shakespear has anatomized this heart; and though Gonerill and Regan be, in a good measure, twin vipers, yet in the foldings of their guilt we may still, perhaps, discover a variation in the degree of their crime. The “unnatural hags” have not been made so by exactly the same process.

In Milton, we perceive a similar careful distinguishment. It is the same base metal that runs from the crucible, but cast into different moulds. Satan and Beelzebub, Moloch and Belial, are so prominently separated, and have their characters so admirably preserved, that,



let us but hear their sentiments, and they individually stand before us. This great poet has drawn his shades of guilt with such discrimination, that the wickedness of these personages seems like different evil qualities of the mind. They all indeed speak the language of revolt, and are smitten with the spirit of blasphemy; they all give into such sentiments, as they, who withdraw allegiance from a lawful Sovereign are apt to imbibe; but the degrees of depravity are accurately marked, and the madness of violence excellently distinguished from the smooth and serpentine windings of craft. Satan is ever Satan, and Moloch is ever Moloch; but they are never one; nor is Mammon, or Belial, like to either of them.

Now, this sameness, my Lord, there is the less excuse for, inasmuch as you were not compelled to give these repeated pictures of villainy to mankind. The call was not imperative for their exhibition. You had not, like the historian, to describe the characters and events of past ages in such colours as justice required; or, at the voice of truth, to paint our human nature as it glares on us, all horrible and hateful, in the burning pages of ambition. Yours was a beautiful and unlimited field; your subjects, the spontaneous productions of your own mind, and where, like the benevolent Richardson—second only to Shakespear in his knowledge of the human heart

and his fine delineations of it—you might have drawn, at once, for the edification and delight of your fellow-creatures; for their confirmation in dignity and their settlement in virtue. For though a poet is advised, and justly, to transform himself into the character which he exhibits, and to be, as it were, the ideal villain, for the moment, of his own imagination, yet is this no apology for everlastingly dwelling upon the same train of thought; for everlastingly pourtraying the vilest propensities of the mind, and actually living and dying amid the same circle of voluptuousness; the same fierce, and brutal, and hardening sensuality. It is a fatal symptom. It proves the heart to be *dead in trespasses and sins* of this nature; to be full of these unholy images; to be sunk and saturated in the gross sentiments it is evermore eliciting; which are perpetually present; which come first; which depart last; and, unconnected with which, your very genius droops, and seems disposed to involve itself in night and darkness.

The Stagyrite, when he insisted upon this rule of identification, could have had no conception that a writer, and of so voluminous a cast, would confine himself to one revolting subject, would pursue one course of disgusting composition, and draw, in his characters, but one solitary picture of mental baseness and deformity. He may be thought rather to have calculated upon his

dwelling on the graces of our common nature, the transports of a pure love, the feelings of a warm friendship, the amenities, all soft and delicate, of a chaste, a correct, and affectionate heart. The severe philosophy of Zeno we, indeed, did not expect from your Lordship; but perpetually to wallow in the sty of Epicurus, and to snort away the fumes of a disgusting intemperance amid crimes and blasphemies, and loathsomeness and misery, putting all moral feeling out of the question, we might have hoped even your taste and talents would have had influence sufficient to have forbidden.

You have, however, I must confess, contrived to give a grace to deformity. You have thrown around these so reprehensible characters, certain commanding energies, which usurp on the virtues naturally destined to adorn purer dispositions. Honour, my Lord, I will not say that you succeed in investing them with. It is a quality made up of the prime of every thing great in man, and cannot bend to fit any but characters of greatness; characters who live upon their reputation, and who, believing that licentious manners are compatible with no stage of society, will hold no communion with those who disregard reputation. Honour, in its chaste and Christian acceptation, it is, I conceive, totally out of his power to draw who has never chosen a virtuous subject for the exertion of his muse, never

taken a virtuous mind as the model of his hero, never suffered the appearance of a virtuous character on the stage of his dramas without throwing it into shade, and never permitted a wife to exhibit herself as a pattern of fidelity and affection, where a harlot or a mistress could be found to supply her place.

This sameness of character and subject will ever constitute a strong ground against the awarding to you the palm of distinguished genius. You had every reason to avoid it in justice to your reputation, and no one will contend that you had not the power. This defect has, in some measure, intailed another defect upon your works. Though your execution must be allowed to be spirited, you have yet not altogether avoided a sort of sameness in the flow of your verse corresponding, almost unavoidably, with this identity of subject. And you need not be reminded how dissonant with the acknowledged principles of composition is that taste which gives the same colouring to every part of a poem, or, the fame of the writer considered, to every successive poem. A dialect all Attic, all Doric, or all Ionic, would, in any language, be destructive. The numbers of the poet to please must be a skilful combination of these varied modes of expression. He must mix the harsh with the delicate, the energetic with the soft, the rude with the polished, the unstudied effusions of the



muse with the last elegancies of composition. On no other terms can he hope for universal acceptance.

You have also, my Lord, though in an inferior degree, been inconsiderate in other respects. A poet, solicitous to establish his fame with posterity, will take care that his numbers lose no part of their force from their indefiniteness. In the works above alluded to, I perceive that you have occasionally so expressed yourself, as to leave your meaning doubtful. This is sedulously to be guarded against, when we consider that poetry itself, as the condensation of thought, must naturally incline to obscurity; as the vehicle of strong and beautiful conception, must frequently, while it administers to our pleasure, tax too our understanding; and that the language of this divine art, like that of philosophy, must be doomed to undergo those changes which no language, ancient or modern, has entirely, perhaps, escaped. Do what we will, time must run his course of depredation upon all human excellencies. New customs and manners, new religions, laws, and institutions, will not only bring a known vocabulary into disuse, but will introduce exotic idioms, that may eventually dispossess the first comers, and usurp their place. Every age from Homer to Horace, and from Horace, through the revival of letters, down to the present time, bears witness to, and is a confirmation

of the fact. Chaucer, to bring the matter home to ourselves, is now obsolete; and Spenser, delighting no less by his moral than his song, is yet gradually receding in his language, never a happy one, from common apprehension. And though we are unwilling to believe that, as generations spring up and decay, they will carry down with them any efficient portion of the genius of Shakespear or of Milton; yet even these great poets, while their thoughts remain immortal, shall feel this universal power of change in both the harmony of their numbers, and the strength, and sweetness, and beauty of their language.

—————"Mortalia facta peribunt;  
 Nedum sermonum stet honos et gratia vivax.  
 Multa renāsentur, quæ jam cecidere; cadentque  
 Quæ nunc sunt in honore vocabula; si volet usus,  
 Quem pēnes arbitrium est, et jus, et norma loquendi."\*

Against this universal devastation of time, there is not, that I am aware of, any lasting defence. Those who have laboured to give an air of antiquity to our own language, I should be sorry to consider as having altogether laboured in vain. The enriching it with words of a foreign idiom may have done somewhat towards its endurance; but we have, I fear, no ground to believe that any assimilations will insure its security from decay. It is, indeed, remarked by the critics,

\* Hor. de Arte Poet. 68.

that Milton in his *Paradise Lost* has, in the choice of his words, strengthened the English language. He has done so—he has made it more sonorous, more magnificent, more classical. But unless the standard of our vernacular idiom could be fixed by an act of parliament, as Cæsar was persuaded by his flatterers that he could give immortality to the Roman tongue, after-ages will pause upon Milton's meaning, as our own age is hourly starting back from the language of our forefathers. Every writer, therefore, ought to be convinced, that, to make his thoughts, generally speaking, intelligible, is the best means he can devise for their endurance, the fullest compensation for the natural instability of expression. His higher conceptions may be left to take care of themselves. Hardly any change will affect sublimity of sentiment, which, as ages roll on, will be perpetually poured out from one to another, and in the existing language of the present be preserved from the obsolete idioms of the past.

You have also, my Lord, to my thinking, pursued, in various parts of your works, certain well known and allowed licences of poetry too far, and have thus turned into defect, what, more sparingly used, we have been accustomed to feel as a beauty. You are, I perceive, a friend to Alliteration. This play and jingle of words I have ever looked upon as the proof of a most

faulty taste. There was a time when these things were better thought of, and when the shout of admiration accompanied the armed heroes "glittering through the gloomy glades." But that effervescence has, in a good measure, subsided into a calmer acquiescence with chaster models. Your delight, however, is to revive these puerilities, to regild the rattle, and put it into the hands of every young Miss and Master. In the beginning of your "Siege of Corinth," we find such an alliterative display as would sicken us of any poetry less captivating than your own. "Sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer." "To warp and wield the vulgar will." "Where thousand sleepers strew'd the strand." "By sunrise must thy sinews shake." "To smite the smiter with the scimeter," &c. &c. &c.

Surely, my Lord, this is not mere negligence or accident. It looks more like concealed artifice; a wish to outdo what you could hardly miss of doing well. If, however, the thing is to be considered as a sort of stealing a march upon genius, which is thus made, like the clouds, to "dapple into day," why, we must leave the miserable expedient as we find it. These matters are as the poet pleases; and if he is delighted with tinsel and trumpery, I suppose his readers must be delighted too.

Pope, your great favourite, who probably contributed to lead your Lordship into this child-



ish perversion of taste, has also exposed his less skilful imitators to another danger in those celebrated lines, in his *Essay on Criticism*, (“ ’tis not enough no harshness give offence,” &c.) which are considered as, at once, a valuable direction and a felicitous example of the adaptation of the sound to the sense. The cadencies of both Homer and Virgil are acknowledged to be as perfect as the skill of these great poets could make them. They well suited the slowness of their verse to the solemnity of their subject, and a corresponding measure imparted life and gaiety to their expressions of rapture. To this end they beautifully congregated their dactyls when they would paint the rapidity of an object, and were as profuse in their spondees when rapidity was out of the question. And so natural and graceful were these assimilations of the language with the thought, that in hardly any instance did the effect fail of becoming commensurate with the intention. In such exhibitions of their rhetorical excellence taste was delighted and judgment was not offended.

But your Lordship will hardly, I fear, be deemed to have rivalled either of these great masters of song in this peculiar department of their art. Indeed with a language like ours the attempt must be next to abortive. We have neither softness, nor variety enough in our rude idioms to play with words and syllables as the

ancients did, nor, in truth, is there much merit to be reaped from such exhibitions were they even more in our power than they are. We must fix a market price upon this commodity. It is worth something, but not much. Quinctilian's orator was hardly more absurdly employed in catching words, and weighing and measuring their meaning, than is that poet who makes these fanciful imitations a serious business. For what is this but to surrender the body of genius to the mere scrapings of the nails.\*

In "The Bride of Abydos," however, and more especially, as I have observed, in "The Siege of Corinth," you have indulged in this kind of painting rather exuberantly. You have used all sorts of words and all measures of verse to place before your readers the very scene of action, and to bring the peculiar doing or suffering home to the heart. But you have, I think, failed to endow your words with life, or to assimilate your expressions with the sense they would describe, and have made all alike unseemly by endeavouring to force language into a perfection which mere language was never intended to reach. As if it were possible to go beyond nature, or even to set art in competition with it! It is only a sottish audience that prefers the mimic to the pig, that will, generally speaking,

\* Quinct. lib. viii.

confess any thing approaching to a happy rivalry between them. The poet can, perhaps, less succeed in making the sound, in any particular instance, an echo to the sense than the musician; and music itself I have sometimes thought becomes pitiable, when it affects to give us the very expression of the raptured, or agonized feelings of the human breast. It is not to be done, or only so to be done that we could wish it had never been attempted.

In one instance you seem to have converted this overstrained refinement into perfect ridiculousness; for you have adopted a measure of verse which gives us the sound, not as an echo, but rather as a direct foil to the sense.

“ The Convent bells are ringing,  
     But mournfully and slow ;  
 In the gray square turret swinging,  
     With a deep sound, to and fro.  
     Heavily to the heart they go !  
 Hark ! the hymn is singing—  
     The song for the dead below,  
     Or the living who shortly shall be so !  
 For a departing being’s soul  
 The death-hymn peals and the hollow bells knoll :  
 He is near his mortal goal ;  
 Kneeling at the Friar’s knee ;  
 Sad to hear—and piteous to see—  
 Kneeling on the bare cold ground,  
 With the block before and the guards around—  
 And the headsman with his bare arm ready,  
 That the blow may be both swift and steady,

Feels if the axe be sharp and true—

Since he set its edge anew :

While the crowd in a speechless circle gather

To see the Son fall by the doom of the Father.” \*

Now, surely nothing can be more preposterously out of nature than this jingling metre, as representative of the preparations for the execution of Hugo. Virgil, in his description of pain and suffering, has used sounds significative, in the highest degree, of the subject passing before the eye of the mind.

“ Hinc exaudiri gemitus, et sæva sonare

Verbera, tum stridor ferri, tractæque catenæ.” †

But one should suppose that you were rather intent upon rivalling his *Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum*, ‡ or its still softer original *Οἷοι Τρώιοι ἵπποι*, &c. § than in riveting upon our attention a scene of such solemnity and terror.

How exquisitely has Milton, in his “ *L’Allegro*,” and “ *Il Penseroso*,” brought this department of the art of poetry to its perfection. How the sound runs through the whole body of these delightful compositions as perfect an echo to the sense as language is capable of becoming ; where every line breathes of the enchantments of nature, and every word is beautifully modulated to

\* *Parisina*.

† *Æneid*, l. vi. 558.

‡ *Æneid*, l. viii. 596.

§ *Il*. v. 222.



the correctest expression of the feeling. But your effort, my Lord, in the above adduced example, is a complete burlesque upon these celebrated prototypes. For here, where the whole scene is a scene, not simply of suffering, but of suffering surrounded by every circumstance of dread; where silence, and sadness, and the yearnings of a parent, and the horrors of execution, and the ponderings upon a last moment, and the fears of futurity occupy every bosom, could it be believed that you have actually chosen a measure and expression that converts all these solemn images into the very spirit of a Bacchanalian orgie, where

“ Midnight shout, and revelry,  
Topsy dance, and jollity,” \*

rule the hour and fill up the sensualities of the soul? Instances of the like defective taste occur in almost every part of your poetry.

Though, however, you fail in making your song moral; in imparting a variety to your characters, and, occasionally, in giving clearness to your conceptions, you must yet forbear to rest in the conclusion that no good is to be found amid all this evil; nothing to approve of, amid so much justly to abominate. If we are not so wedded to your genius as to overlook her aberrations, neither are we so disgusted with her indecencies

\* Milton, Comus.

as to deny her powers. Whether with Ariosto you strike your harp to themes of grandeur, and open to our view a new heaven and earth of invention; or with Dante explore the regions of other worlds, and fetch up from the realms of darkness awful images and fearful objects; whether you charm us with the fancy of Shakespear, the fire of Milton, the energy and conciseness of Dryden, or the smoothly-flowing harmony of Pope, we alike confess the master spirit that rules over your numbers and persuades us in the moment of enchantment to cover up deformity.

Mistake me not, therefore—I am no ascetic, my Lord, who turns from the light of genius without paying homage to its powers. I can condemn the defects in these efforts of your muse, and still admire the beauties which vainly endeavour to atone for them. I can view, with Harold, the scenery of Nature as it lies vast and magnificent before me, and give myself up to its sublimity, and convert my soul into its loneliness and loveliness, and feel that,

“To sit on rocks, to muse o’er flood and fell,  
To slowly trace the forest’s shady scenes,  
Where things that own not man’s dominion dwell,  
And mortal foot hath ne’er, or rarely been,” \*

is indeed, “not solitude,” but the awfulness of the Deity spread around me. I can linger at the pass of Thermopylæ, and invoke the shades

\* Childe Harold, Canto ii.

that have immortalized its name, and gather glorious sentiments from this "sepulchral" record of glorious actions. I can lament over the departure, from "Belgium's capital,"\* of warriors that were never more to return to the beauty they had left and fondly hoped to meet again, and give a sigh to the memory, as "Ardenne's waves above them her green leaves," of this "fiery mass of living valour," ere evening, alas! to be "trodden like the grass." I can tear myself from this finished picture of "the field of blood," and enjoy "the hush of night" on the lake Leman, and imagine myself upon its still bosom, cut off from the cares of the world, and awake only to the tranquillity of Nature, "breathing a living fragrance of flowers, yet fresh with childhood,"† around me. I can ascend the Alps and behold where "eternity sits throned in icy halls of cold sublimity," and contrast it with the luxury of that departing hour of eve, when "the moon is up, and yet it is not night," and when

"A single star is at her side, and reigns  
With her o'er half the lovely Heaven."‡

I can contemplate the "garden of the world" spread out before me, and believe it the fairest portion of the globe, the softest clime of beauty, on which the Creator may look down, as he did when "Heaven and Earth rose out of Chaos," and still pronounce it good.

\* Canto iii.

† Canto iii.

‡ Canto iv.

" The commonwealth of Kings, the men of Rome!  
 And even since, and now, fair Italy!  
 Thou art the garden of the world, the home  
 Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree;  
 Even in thy desert, what is like to thee?  
 Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste  
 More rich than other climes' fertility;  
 Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced  
 With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced."\*

I can sit me down by the banks of the Clitumnus, and bid the classic page unroll itself, by which, though never with a pencil more just and delicate than your own, its streams have been consecrated and its locality defined.\* I can gaze on the cataract of Velino, and, forgetful of its offence against the strict rules of your art, can ponder the description, never perhaps exceeded, till I entrance myself into the same strong and awful cast of feeling that pervaded the imagination of the poet.

" Lo where it comes like an eternity,  
 As if to sweep down all things in its tract,  
 Charming the eye with dread."\*—

I can view the ocean in its immensity, and admire the genius that describes with so much sublimeness, mixed, alas! with so much that is repulsive, this everlasting world of waters.

" Time writes no wrinkles on thine azure brow—  
 Such as Creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now."\*

\* Canto iv.



I can pause over that "vast and wondrous monument," the Coliseum, and call up unhappy forms from the dust of death, and bid them tell me of their departed agonies and glories.\* I can behold the dying Gladiator this moment, and, feeling myself in the very presence of the excruciated, noble, forsaken, expiring object, can pay the highest honour to your Phidian powers of expression by instinctively turning from it the next.\* I can enter the "eternal ark of worship," and contemplating,

"All musical in its immensities ;

Rich marbles—richer painting—shrines where flame

The lamps of gold,"\*

can "pause, and be enlightened," and confess that

—"there is more

In such a survey than the sating gaze

Of wonder pleased, or awe which would adore

The worship of the place."\*

Surrounded by these monuments of another world, I forgive the errors of an evanescent creed, and exclaim with a devotion that I dare not divest myself of, *This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven.* In your apostrophe to the "scion of Chiefs and Monarchs," the "fond hope of many nations," I can walk with the dead, and behold where,

—"in the dust,

The fair-hair'd daughter of the Isles is laid,

The love of millions !"\*

\* Canto iv.

But when I recollect, by whom this solemn dirge is sung, and that the panegyrist of the daughter's virtues is no other than the assassin of the parent's fame, the spirit "mixes with thin air," and the enchantment is at an end!

Such, my Lord, are among the beauties which I am proud to acknowledge in the Cantos of your Childe Harold; and they might easily be increased, did not other beauties, in your other works, sway my mind with an equal attraction. I confess your sweet paintings of "that land the fostering nurse of civilization; where the spirit of Antiquity still seems to linger amidst its olive groves, its myrtle bowers, and the precious relics of its splendid edifices."\* It is indeed "Greece, but living Greece no more."—I look upon your picture of Death as upon *the face of an angel*; and applying the cold, beautiful description to beloved objects within my own remembrance, can almost impose upon myself the conviction that the pure spirit has not yet fled its original mansion.

"He who hath bent him o'er the dead  
Ere the first day of death is fled,  
The first dark day of nothingness,  
The last of danger and distress,  
(Before Decay's effacing fingers  
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers,)

\* Hughes's Address to the People of England in the cause of the Greeks.

And mark'd the mild angelic air,  
 The rapture of repose that 's there,  
 The fix'd yet tender traits that streak  
 The languor of the placid cheek,  
 And—but for that sad shrouded eye,  
 That fires not, wins not, weeps not now,  
 And but for that chill changeless brow,  
 Where cold Obstruction's apathy  
 Appals the gazing mourner's heart,  
 As if to him it could impart  
 The doom he dreads, yet dwells upon ;  
 Yes, but for these and these alone,  
 Some moments, ay, one treacherous hour,  
 He still might doubt the tyrant's power ;  
 So fair, so calm, so softly seal'd,  
 The first, last look by death reveal'd."\*

I place myself within the solitary Hall of Hassant†, and immersed in the splendid dream of its past enjoyments, its present desolation, and all the raptures and sorrows associated therewith; I confess the divinity of the poet that can enchant the fancy with such a picture, and with such a mournfulness affect the heart‡. I listen to the Bulbul in the place of tombs, and delight to feel the melancholy that steals upon the mind from recognitions of superstition which the understanding dares not countenance, and which yet, in its relaxed moments, it has hardly strength to disavow§. I return with the Corsair,

\* The Giaour. † Ib. ‡ Ib.

§ Bride of Abydos.

and joy with him in a home that he never more expected to see, and weep with him over the object that is to extinguish for ever his happiness and his hopes ; nor consent I to pause on even the beauty of those numbers which wrap my heart in so overpowering a regret.

“ He turn’d not—spoke not—sunk not—fix’d his look,  
 And set the anxious frame that lately shook :  
 He gaz’d—how long we gaze despite of pain,  
 And know, but dare not own, we gaze in vain !  
 In life itself she was so still and fair,  
 That death with gentler aspect wither’d there ;  
 And the cold flowers her colder hand contain’d,  
 In that last grasp as tenderly were strain’d  
 As if she scarcely felt, but feign’d a sleep,  
 And made it almost mockery yet to weep :  
 The long dark lashes fringed her lids of snow,  
 And veil’d—thought shrinks from all that lurk’d below—  
 Oh ! o’er the eye Death most exerts his might,  
 And hurls the spirit from her throne of light !  
 Sinks those blue orbs in that long last eclipse,  
 But spares, as yet, the charm around her lips—  
 Yet, yet they seem as they forbore to smile,  
 And wish’d repose—but only for a while ;  
 But the white shroud, and each extended tress,  
 Long—fair—but spread in utter lifelessness,  
 Which, late the sport of every summer wind,  
 Escaped the baffled wreath that strove to bind ;  
 These—and the pale pure cheek, became the bier—  
 But she is nothing—”\*

I am present with Leoni at his open lattice, when

\* The Corsair.



——“ the cloudy wind which blew  
 From the Levant hath crept into its cave,  
 And the broad moon has brighten'd,”

and look out with him on the magic city, meeting, in its beautiful distinctness, the very organ as it were of sight itself\*. I wander with the Renegade, and enter into his feelings, and am struck by his fears when the hour of midnight sets before him, in all its solemn stillness, the form that is not earthly, and the love that has already shrouded itself in the grave†. I recognize no mean casuist in the developement, full of truth and tenderness, of the power of the mind to create its own happiness out of the simplest materials that Providence, ever merciful, casts in its way.

“ Of objects all inanimate I made  
 Idols, and out of wild and lonely flowers,  
 And rocks whereby they grew, a paradise.” ‡

I mourn over the soft, and patient, and silent younger sufferer, and am present with the horrors of a situation where light is denied, and destruction does her work in darkness, as he gradually sinks into the arms of death with

——“ not a word of murmur, not  
 A groan o'er his untimely lot.” §

I disdain not, monster as he is, to mix some

\* Doge of Venice.

† The Siege of Corinth.

‡ Lament of Tasso.

§ Prisoner of Chillon.

pity for the lost and fallen Lara with my admiration of his faithful Page, following him through life, clinging to him in death, and evincing, ah, so fatally ! the love of her heart in the distraction of her mind\*. I, finally, hesitate not to confess, that I bow me down and worship the Genius, which, alluding to a portrait recalling some face we think we have seen before, exclaims, in “syllables that breathe of the sweet South,”

“ One of those forms which flit by us, when we  
Are young, and fix our eyes on every face ;  
And, oh ! the loveliness at times we see  
In momentary gliding, the soft grace,  
The youth, the bloom, the beauty which agree,  
In many a nameless being we retrace,  
Whose course and home we know not, nor shall know,  
Like the lost Pleiad † seen no more below.” ‡

Yes, my Lord, with these, and with many other portions of your works, I seek acquaintance with the earnestness of one who desires to go to the fairest models of Genius for the highest sources of his enjoyments, nor can any detestation of your deformities take away from this reverence for your beauties. Here, if you are original, you are immortal.

But great as you are in these exquisite delineations of nature and of mind, you are yet not

\* Lara.

† Beppo.

‡ Quæ septem dici, sex tamen esse solent.—OVID.

more so than we have a right to expect, placed as you were under circumstances of peculiar favourableness. When you described the ruins of Rome, you were on the spot. You were on the spot when you electrify us with the remembrances of Greece, of the Plains of Ilium, of the seat of ancient learning, and of the remains of her antiquity. When, with a pencil glowing with strength and softness, you painted the "wizard streams" and romantic regions of the South, you were traversing their climes, and in the very midst and heart of their beauties. And you need not, I am sure, be told what advantage this locality, associated with the history of past heroic ages, gives to a poet; how it makes him sublimer in his views and thoughts; how his soul admits of a deeper enchantment, and his muse of a loftier imagination, when on the plain of Marathon he sings of the departed glories of Greece, or on the banks of the Scamander of the field sanctified by the battles of Gods and men. The beauties of Arcadia will be found to be beauties nowhere so fresh and faithful as in Arcadia. On the spot which years and genius have consecrated, all poetical inspiration must be at its height. It must be wrapped in a holy and divine awfulness. It must possess the quick passing feeling of an ethereal mind, bright and beautiful, and with the very energy about it of its native Heaven. What is lovely, is never so lovely

as at such a moment. What is great, never rises to such sublimity. "I stood upon the Symplegades. I stood by the broken altar still exposed to the winds upon one of them. I felt all the poetry of the situation as I repeated the first lines of the *Medea* \*," &c. My Lord, you felt but as you ought to have felt; as it would have been a slur upon your heart, and an eternal stain upon your genius, not to have felt. So entranced, even the merest clod of the valley would have perceived "some rousing motions" in him, and, impressed by a growing intellect, have sent forth imagination upon a stronger pinion and a wider range. Fancy must have died to the soul indeed, if, thus situated, your muse had experienced any incapacity to "gaze her visions wild and feel unmixed her flame."

What philosophers call the association of ideas, repugnant as it may occasionally be to the progress of science, is yet of prime importance to the genius of poetry. It is a strange process of the brain. It hangs by small threads and filaments, and works its way through dead and subterranean channels until it emerges, at length, into perfect day. Discarding present objects, it deals with "the dark backward and abysm of time," and calls up from thence images of fondness, of faithfulness, and of beauty. How we

\* Letter on the Rev. W. L. Bowles's "Strictures on the Life and Writings of Pope."



come by this mysterious power, we cannot tell. Some chord is struck that, like lightning, spreads its vibrations through the whole soul; and from these "dim discovered tracts of mind," presently rich with thought, imagination bodies forth the illustrious forms, which, but for such connexion, might never have awoke from their slumber, or been drawn out in their greatness.

This association of our ideas is, perhaps, more predominant in its enchantment, where solemnity reigns over the colouring which it assumes; and I have often thought, my Lord, that, reverting to this source of melancholy pleasure, our family pictures are not the meanest part of our family possessions. If we can steal a moment from present seducements to dwell with "the years beyond the flood," we shall find their contemplation no undelightful employment. They give us back, with the images, the honours and the virtues of our ancestry. We trace the line of our descent *from generation to generation*, and, with it, the illustrious deeds by which it hath been ennobled. We learn what has been done by them. We feel what is required of us. We are made sensible how poor and worthless nobility sits upon a mind that is not noble; and how lost a character is his who can be tranquil under the consciousness, that, of all the honours he enjoys, he can boast of none which he has not disgraced.

These family portraits virtue will make her

best school ; it is vice only that forbears to value them ; vice that has a heart too hard to admit of any tenderness of impressions, from associations of even the most endearing nature. For otherwise, how fondly should we contemplate the departed line of our ancestors, not the poor, drooping, emaciated figures they were, probably, before they sunk into the grave, but, by the blessed power of painting—" sic sine vita vivere, quam suave est !"—all elegant and beautiful as in their morning of life, when happiness opened upon them wherever they turned the eye of innocence, and when it could be turned nowhere without meeting the object of its search. Who can look upon these hallowed memorials, and not feel his *heart burn within him*, and not carry back his thoughts from the dead forms to the living actions of his forefathers—to the "sundry and manifold changes of the world"—to magnificence decayed, grandeur obliterated, and affection forgotten. Yes, when all memory is departed ; when the steps that go down to the chambers of death are wearing fast away ; when the first objects of our regard, are, alas ! becoming the last in our recollection, some breath of Heaven, springing up we hardly know how, sweetly touches a string that recovers the tender tones which time had nearly obliterated. Then it is that the very sight of these portraits of ancient days fills us with regret. They bring

our neglects home to us. They compel us to feel the injury we have committed in suffering all that once made up the pomp and pride, the joy and happiness of our lives, to have so long mouldered into indifference amid the lapse of years and the infirmities of forgetfulness.

Strongly too doth this power of association shew itself in another mournful office of the mind, which, however, your Lordship has not hitherto shewn yourself to be much affected by. We cannot quit the sacred soil of our nativity without deep regret. We cannot unimpassioned even "gaze on this fair earth and sky." To feelings of delicacy local attachments will ever be dear. The scenes of nature which, from early years, we have been accustomed to assimilate with our fondest enjoyments, will become holy ground the moment we are about to be torn from them. How beautifully does Eve take a last farewell of her garden, on the Archangel's delivery of his divine commission for her departure.

" O unexpected stroke, worse than of Death!  
Must I thus leave thee, Paradise? thus leave  
Thee, native soil! these happy walks and shades,  
Fit haunt of Gods? where I had hope to spend,  
Quiet though sad, the respite of that day  
That must be mortal to us both. O flowers,  
That never will in other climate grow,  
My early visitation, and my last  
At even, which I bred up with tender hand  
From the first opening bud, and gave ye names!

Who now shall rear ye to the sun, or rank  
 Your tribes, and water from the ambrosial fount?  
 Thee lastly, nuptial bower! by me adorn'd  
 With what to sight or smell was sweet! from thee  
 How shall I part, and whither wander down  
 Into a lower world; to this obscure  
 And wild? how shall we breathe in other air  
 Less pure, accustom'd to immortal fruits?"\*

Nay, so predominant is this feeling, that it actually takes place under circumstances where the association of ideas, one should suppose, would rather prevail to its rejection. Thus Philoctetes, about to accompany Ulysses and Neoptolemus, by a divine suggestion, to the siege of Troy, pathetically exclaims,

Χαῖρ ὦ μελαθρον, &c.†

How exquisitely true to nature has the poet here shewn himself. Upon all that we are about to leave, Time impresses a sanctity which no sense of suffering is sufficient to eradicate. The cave of Philoctetes—wretchedness itself—the Hermæan mount; the rocks, the waves, the winds; every thing, in short, that had been mixed up with his agonies and had witnessed his despair, beheld for the last time, are contemplated with fondness and bidden adieu to with regret. Thus does man, as he looks back upon life, perceive his departing prospects gradually grow into beauty, though, while they were present, he could see no beauty in them. A merciful ordainment this of Provi-

\* Paradise Lost, Book xi. † Sophocles' Philoctetes.



dence, that when *the evil days come*, and *the years draw nigh* in which we *have no pleasure*, the remembrance of our past happiness shall constitute our sweetest recompense for the loss of present enjoyments! Yes—even under the most afflictive circumstances this ray of the Divinity doth evermore abide with us, and from very *clouds and darkness* elicits recollections of comfort!

And as the power of association thus connects the mind with domestic incidents and attachments, with consecrated places and consecrated things, so doth it more potently work, and upon a grander scale, when grander objects arise to call it forth. There for the poet to be upon the spot; to have the subject before his eyes; the very images of glory and of mournfulness bound upon his heart, is almost to seize upon and appropriate immortality. Think for a moment, my Lord, how you were situated when you drew your celebrated sketches of the ruins of Rome. A mass of magnificence was spread around you—columns, arches, statues, tombs—all that the eye delights, all that the heart regrets to behold. You were an isolated being in the midst of a departed world whose glory and greatness have overspread the earth. Why, the very mausoleums must have been ready to open at your “strong bidding.” The heroes of Rome, clad in their patriotic sternness, must have almost stood before you. Amid such venerable relics of antiquity, such breathing memorials, the inspiration of the great father of poetry him-

self must have been upon you. Your whole soul must have been filled with majestic recollections. For there is nothing so awful as the forms gone down to the dust; nothing so beautiful as the beauty mixed with its ashes; nothing so vast a subject for genius as the "giant-statue," fallen from "its wide ambitious base," and only awaiting the hand of time to rob it of its remaining grandeur. In such a moment of enthusiasm, and on such a consecrated spot, who, knowing your powers, can wonder that you were enabled to consecrate your song?

These are not, my Lord, imaginary advantages—they are great and substantial ones, and such as you do yourself confess to be considerable. For in your "Corsair," you offer it as your apology for giving us a repetition of some beautiful but irrelevant lines, at the beginning of the third Canto, that they were written on the spot.\* You also justly make it your boast, that your apostrophe to Parnassus was composed under the same favourable circumstances. "These stanzas were written in Castri (Delphos), at the foot of Parnassus, now called Λιακὺρα, Liakura."† And of this fitness for the exercise of your poetical powers, you seem, too, sufficiently sensible. "It is one thing (say you, in a note to your third Canto of Harold,) to read the Iliad at Sigæum and on the tumuli, or by the springs with Mount Ida above, and the plain and rivers and Archipe-

\* See Note 14.

† See Note 13 to Harold, Canto i.

lago around you ; and another to trim your taper over it in a snug library—this I know.” Your poetry, too, is in consonance with the same conviction.

“ Happier in this than mightiest bards have been,  
Whose fate to distant homes confined their lot,  
Shall I unmoved behold the hallow’d scene,  
Which others rave of, though they know it not ?” \*

In the possession of these magical advantages, I am not, however, certain that you have made the most of them. I am not certain that in some instances, and those among the brightest upon your record, you have not rather fallen below than soared above expectation. I know the heresy of such an opinion, but, though a martyr at the stake, I must still persist in entertaining it. Your fourth Canto of “ Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” a large part of which is appropriated to the description of Italy, draws a picture of the antiquities of that celebrated country, and especially of the ruins of Rome, in which we delight to confess the hand of a master. Still you have not done justice to your great subject. You have not made of it what the true poet in your situation would have made. You have not poured forth over the grandeur of the design a commensurate execution. Your genius neglects to grasp the application of her song. She every where, it is true, presents a splendid and a correct likeness of these venerable remains ; she places them in impres-

\* Harold, Canto i. S. 62.

sive attitudes; she stamps on them the spirit of strength and animation; and over all she casts a beauty of expression that marks them for highly favoured emanations. But, alas! the soul of description is wanting. Nothing is given to virtue; nothing to patriotism; nothing to the deep and awful responsibilities which man must feel when he pauses on these monuments of departed ambition. We stand with you indeed “’midst the chief relics of Almighty Rome,” and behold a moonlight scenery worthy of such a place and of such a pencil.

“ The trees which grew along the broken arches  
 Waved dark in the blue midnight, and the stars  
 Shone through the rents of ruin; from afar  
 The watchdog bay’d beyond the Tiber; and  
 More near from out the Cæsars’ palace came  
 The owl’s long cry, and, interruptedly,  
 Of distant sentinels the fitful song  
 Begun and died upon the gentle wind.” \*

The Palatine, the Pantheon, the Vátican, the Laocoon, the Grotto of Egeria, † all swim before us in airiness and majesty; are all drawn with a hand that never trembles, and in colours that will never fade. But where, my Lord, do we find you clothing imagination with such an awfulness as the mind is prone to deal in when

———“ the heart runs o’er  
 With silent worship of the Great of old;  
 The dead but sceptred Sovereigns, who still rule  
 Our spirits from their urns ?” †

\* Manfred.      † Harold, Canto iv.      † Manfred.



Where does your muse elicit from these fragments of grandeur the design, the end, the awful nature of man? where correct the noisy and narrow ambitions of this world by sublimely pointing to that *eternal weight of glory* reserved for silent and patient virtue in another?

This identification of poetry with Christianity you have not adventured upon. Your descriptive beauties are indeed of a high form, but they stand lone and naked, and, careless of *length of days*, rest their poor, meagre consolation upon a deciduous fame; upon that fame which a mere harmony of numbers can command that "plays round the head, but comes not to the heart." Even here, however, my Lord, strongly as in your genius you are intrenched, a genius no less powerful that has occupied the field before you, has, in my opinion, more than divided the palm with you. And because the subject is of no common cast, and so far as your relative merits are concerned, of no common importance, I must be pardoned a somewhat longer digression than, under other circumstances, might perhaps be decorous. It may yet possibly not be a digression altogether in vain, if it open to your view a new source of beauty; for never having looked into Milton, as you assure us\*, "since you were twenty," it is possible that you may hardly have

\* Preface to "Cain, a Mystery."

thought it worth while to consult the pages of inferior poets at all.

Dyer was, I believe, placed in the same enviable situation with yourself, and he has not disgraced it. Though he possessed powers of description allowed to be of the first order, yet on these he rested not his fame. He was ever mindful of the moral keeping of his pieces, and he suffers neither his "Fleece," nor his "Grongar Hill," nor his "Ruins of Rome," to slide from our perusal, without pressing some lesson of instruction upon the heart. In the latter of these fine compositions, which I am now about to examine, he mingles with the magic of his pencil the world of soul.

" Aspice murorum moles, præruptaque saxa,  
Obrutaque horrenti vasta theatra situ:  
Hæc sunt *Roma*."

A feeling so powerful was not likely to be lost upon Dyer. His genius arrested it in all the mournfulness of its sublimity, and has produced a work that will outlast the very subject which it immortalizes.

This fine poem opens upon the reader in a style of graphical elegance and beauty.

" Enough of Grongar, and the shady dales  
Of winding Towy, Merlin's fabled haunt,  
I sung inglorious. Now the love of arts,  
And what in metal or in stone remains  
Of proud Antiquity, through various realms

And various languages and ages famed,  
 Bears me remote o'er Gallia's woody bounds,  
 O'er the cloud-piercing Alps remote, beyond  
 The vale of Arno, purpled with the vine,  
 Beyond the Umbrian and Etruscan hills,  
 To Latium's wide champaign, forlorn and waste,  
 Where yellow Tiber his neglected wave  
 Mournfully rolls. Yet once again, my Muse!  
 Yet once again, and soar a loftier flight;  
 Lo! the resistless theme, imperial Rome."

Such a theme might well call forth the highest powers of the poet, and force meditation into a partnership with Genius. Here, therefore, Dyer will be found to shew himself a philosopher of the most Christian and moral cast. His exordium is solemn and appropriate.

" Fallen, fallen, a silent heap! her heroes all  
 Sunk in their urns; behold the pride of pomp,  
 The throne of nations, fallen! obscured in dust;  
 Ev'n yet majestic."

We are charmed with the first prospect that he throws upon his animated canvass. It is a drawing from Nature in all her majesty and melancholy.

" Deep lies in dust the Theban obelisk  
 Immense along the waste" —  
 ——" Globose and huge,  
 Gray-mouldering temples swell, and wide o'ercast  
 The solitary landscape, hills and woods,  
 And boundless wilds; while the vine-mantled brows  
 The pendent goats unveil, regardless they

Of hourly peril, though the clefted domes  
 Tremble to every wind. The pilgrim oft,  
 At dead of night, mid his oraison hears  
 Aghast the voice of Time, disparting towers,  
 Tumbling all precipitate down-dash'd,  
 Rattling around, loud thundering to the moon ;  
 While murmurs soothe each awful interval  
 Of ever falling waters ; shrouded Nile,  
 Eridanus, and Tiber with his twins,  
 And palmy Euphrates : they with dropping locks  
 Hang o'er their urns, and mournfully among  
 The plaintive-echoing ruins pour their streams."

Here every figure is distinctly seen rising into existence. The painting speaks at once to the eye, the ear, the heart, the understanding. It fills up the whole compass of the soul of taste. We can desire, we can conjecture nothing more poetically conceived, more sublimely, more harmoniously expressed. We are brought into a captivity which we have no power of resisting ; we are soothed into a mournfulness which we have no disposition to wish away. It is a beautiful picture that requires only reiterated examination to increase in beauty.

After listening, astonished, to the cavern'd sewers,

—— "how they heave their rocks in vain !  
 Though now incessant Time has roll'd around  
 A thousand winters o'er the changeful world,  
 And yet a thousand since."——

we travel with the poet "over airy plains," by



‘ crystal founts,” and “ vases boss’d,” and  
 “ vines intermingled,” and “ figured nymphs,”

———“ and deep empty tombs,  
 And dells, and mouldering shrines, with old decay  
 Rustic and green, and wide-embowering shades,  
 Shot from the crooked clefts of nodding towers ;  
 A solemn wilderness !”

we linger, with “ error sweet,” amid “ idols of  
 antique guise,”

———“ Preposterous Gods  
 Of fear and ignorance, by the sculptor’s hand  
 Hewn into form and worship’d” —

On every side we behold “ historic urns and  
 breathing statues ;” and while we contemplate in  
 Cocles, Manlius, the Fabii, the Decii, how “ rose  
 the Roman state,” the whole soul becomes im-  
 bued with Roman heroism and grandeur. The  
 poet, with a noble feeling, has caught the inspi-  
 ration.

“ Me now, of these  
 Deep musing, high ambitious thoughts inflame  
 Greatly to serve my country, distant land,  
 And build me virtuous fame ; nor shall the dust  
 Of these fallen piles with show of sad decay  
 Avert the good resolve.”

Here, my Lord, here is a glorious purpose to  
 which he turns the awfulness of his subject and  
 the numbers of his muse. This is consecrating  
 genius indeed.

The imagery of the poem will be found to be

every where exquisite, and every where exact. This is an advantage resulting from locality, which usually imparts not only more poetical fire, but a greater correctness of expression. Nature, whether “wantoning, as in her prime,” or covered with the wrecks of art and the majestic monuments of man, is never so happily portrayed as when we have the very objects before us; and he who shall trust to his recollection for the verisimilitude of his descriptions, shall find even the brightest fancy and the chastest powers of delineation to fail him. The picture must be drawn in its glowing state, while the scenery is yet before the eye, and the impression departs not from the mind. The pencil will then do its duty, and the subject will start forth into life and originality. Correctness, indeed, is the soul of descriptive poetry. It gathers its fame from its circumstantiality. Wanting fidelity, it wants every thing.

We shall see, my Lord, as we proceed, that in this point Dyer wanted nothing; that he is equally exact in his Gliconian as in his globose forms; and that, while all the sublimity of genius rules in his poetry, all the correctness of the painter is discoverable in his language. In accompanying him in his

———“toilsome step up the proud Palatine,  
Through spiry cypress groves, and towering pine,  
Waving aloft o’er the big ruin’s brows,  
On numerous arches rear’d”——

we are amply repaid both in the prospects that offer, and in the reflections that spring from them. Here we have the ruins of Rome spread out, in one magnificent mass, before us :

“ Rent palaces, crush’d columns, rifled moles,  
Fanes roll’d on fanes, and tombs on buried tombs.”

What a scenery for the poet and the philosopher! We are lost in mournful recollections. Our heart is with past ages ; with that dead and departed world before us, where all is hushed in silence and darkness ! where Ambition having done her work, and Glory spun her thread, and Poverty suffered her probation,

——“ Cæsars, heroes, peasants, hermits lie  
Blended in dust together !”

In such a situation of solemnity, there is no calculating upon any command of feeling. We are not ourselves ; we have not our reason ; we are alive but to passion, to genius, and to grief.

——“ There is a mood  
(I sing not to the vacant and the young),  
There is a kindly mood of melancholy  
That wings the soul, and points her to the skies :  
When tribulation clothes the child of man,  
When age descends with sorrow to the grave,  
’Tis sweetly soothing sympathy to pain,  
A gently wakening call to health and ease.  
How musical ! when all devouring Time,  
Here sitting on his throne of ruins hoar,  
While winds and tempests sweep his various lyre,  
How sweet thy diapason, Melancholy !”

Here then, in the very spirit of sweet and pensive melancholy, and in the full blaze of descriptive beauty, here have we successively depicted the Coliseum, the Capitol, the Pantheon, the Temple of Concord, the Baths of Caracalla, the Tower of Nero, and every antiquity that sanctifies this interesting spot. It is one vast assemblage of Roman grandeur, where “ashes to ashes, and dust to dust,” concludes the apotheosis of Roman greatness. Still, in her very ruins she carries an awe, and looks the mistress of the world; nor can Tully’s fine remark, now that Time has run his solemn progression through ages, be any where more intimately applicable than to the hallowed soil of his own nativity. “*Tanta vis admonitionis inest in locis. Et id quidem in hac urbe infinitum; quacumque enim ingredimur, in aliquam Historiam vestigium ponimus.*” \*

In his description of the Temple of Concord, the patriotism of the poet takes fire, and we are presented with one of the finest addresses to Liberty, rational, manly Liberty, that any muse, ancient or modern, has to boast of. It is too long to quote entire, and too excellent to be injured by less than entire quotation. But I assure your Lordship it is an apostrophe of so just and generous a nature; so classically expressive of the glorious progress; so faithfully descriptive of the various blessings of liberty; so

\* Cic. de Fin. Lib. v.



warmly appropriative of her dearest and noblest spirit to his own beloved country, that every Englishman of whatever persuasion, political or religious, (that alone of the cold, dead, Satanic school excepted) must revere the patriotism of the man no less than they will admire the genius of the poet. In one of the great public works which he imputes, somewhat dubiously perhaps, to her influence, he describes the Roman aqueducts in numbers rich and expressive as surely ever bard employed :

“ Thine, too, those musically falling founts,  
 To slake the clammy lip; adown they fall,  
 Musical ever, while from yon blue hills,  
 Dim in the clouds, the radiant aqueducts  
 Turn their innumerable arches o’er  
 The spacious desert, brightening in the sun,  
 Proud and more proud in their august approach :  
 High o’er irriguous vales, and woods, and towns,  
 Glide the soft-whispering waters in the wind,  
 And, here united, pour their silver streams  
 Among the figured rocks, in murmuring falls,  
 Musical ever.”

Much that is beautiful in this poem I have quoted. Much that is equally beautiful I reluctantly omit. I say nothing of his description of the Temple of Romulus and Remus :

“ The conquests, glories, of the Ausonian state,  
 Wrapp’d in their secret seeds.”—

Nothing of those “ ancient roads,” stupendous in design and extent,

“ With tombs high verged, the solemn paths of Fame !  
 ———— o’er whose broad flints  
 Such crowds have roll’d, so many storms of war,  
 So many pòmps, so many wondering realms.”—

Nothing of the stately column, still beautiful in  
 decay,

“ From whose low base the sculptures wind aloft,  
 And lead through various toils up the rough steep  
 Its hero to the skies.”—

Nothing of “ Maro’s humble tenement,” where  
 ———— “ the lofty Bard  
 Framed the celestial song, or social walk’d  
 With Horace and the ruler of the world.”—

Nothing of the poet’s animated recollections of  
 the earlier worship of his divine art,

——— “ Thrice glorious days,  
 Auspicious to the Muses! then revered,  
 Then hallow’d was the fount, or secret shade,  
 Or open mountain, or whatever scene  
 The poet chose to tune the ennobling rhyme  
 Melodious.”—

Nothing of the rise, the height, the voluptuous  
 decline and fall of this mighty Empire ;

——— “ so revolves the scene ;  
 So Time ordains, who rolls the things of pride  
 From dust again to dust !”

These are parts of this fine poem, which, to be-  
 come acquainted with, is to have an accession of  
 enchantment thrown upon the soul ; which once  
 to peruse is never to forget.

After, finally, adverting to the triumph of the Roman arms “till fame was silent of their foes ;” to the fatal progress of voluptuousness and vice, and the appalling approach of “the Goth and Vandal, dreaded names,” he thus, in a grand style of majestic reflection, concludes this correct and beautifully descriptive production :

“ Vain end of human strength, of human skill,  
 Conquest, and triumph, and domain, and pomp,  
 And ease, and luxury ! O Luxury !  
 Bane of elated life, of affluent states,  
 What dreary change, what ruin, is not thine ?  
 How doth thy bowl intoxicate the mind !  
 To the soft entrance of thy rosy cave  
 How dost thou lure the fortunate and great !  
 Dreadful attraction ! while behind thee gapes  
 The unfathomable gulf where Ashur lies  
 O'erwhelm'd, forgotten, and high-boasting Cham,  
 And Elam's haughty pomp, and beauteous Greece,  
 And the great queen of earth, imperial *Rome* !”

I will not, my Lord, insist upon any other comparison between you upon this occasion, than what the perusal of your respective poems must naturally, and in a general way, suggest to the reader. Taking it altogether, no painting can be finer than this of Dyer's. There is in it most of the qualities that are supposed to go to the composition of beauty. There is a just distribution of light and shade ; there is grace in every attitude, expression in every lineament, animation in every figure. We behold softness and delicacy

mixed with strength and grandeur ; variety in the direction of the parts, and those parts melting and blending together ; an association so powerful as to open one sepulchral apartment after another, and a perspective so correct that the whole scenery appears before the eye, gradually meeting and gradually receding from it. This regularity of ordonnance is peculiar to Dyer. No other poet has, I think, so perfectly attained to it. But why dwell upon these lighter graces of his art, where there is so much to make us forget every grace and forgive every defect ; where we are enraptured by his genius and instructed by his virtue ; where the same mind that so beautifully exhibits to us the Roman greatness, so powerfully persuades us of its vanity and emptiness ; and from the mausoleums of the dead, where they sleep in fame and glory, points to those mansions, reserved for us hereafter, where all fame is silent and all glory is forgotten !

In your scattered descriptions of Greece, you have, I think, been more fortunate, nor have you here, perhaps, any so pre-eminent rival as to throw your abilities into shade. We cannot, upon this occasion, be just to your talents without allotting to you a large portion of admiration ; and were I required to adduce any proof that, in your happier moments, you possess those powers which lighted up the genius of Homer and Milton, I would turn, with a proud confi-



dence of success, to the extract by which I am about to enrich these pages. I know not that the language of your country has any sweeter poetry to boast of. Like the paintings of the Acropolis, it is "one continued scene of elegance and beauty," where the thoughts, clad in their native grandeur, roll on in harmonious numbers, a heavenly exhibition of all that is soft and heavenly in our imagination.

"And yet how lovely in thine age of woe,  
Land of lost gods and godlike men! art thou!  
Thy vales of ever-green, thy hills of snow  
Proclaim thee Nature's varied favourite now :  
Thy fanes, thy temples to thy surface bow,  
Commingling slowly with heroic earth,  
Broke by the share of every rustic plough :  
So perish monuments of mortal birth,  
So perish all in turn, save well recorded Worth ;

Save where some solitary column mourns  
Above its prostrate brethren of the cave ;  
Save where Tritonia's airy shrine adorns  
Colonna's cliff, and gleams along the wave ;  
Save o'er some warrior's half-forgotten grave,  
Where the gray stones and unmolested grass  
Ages, but not oblivion, feebly brave,  
While strangers only not regardless pass,  
Lingering like me, perchance, to gaze, and sigh 'Alas!'

Yet are thy skies as blue, thy crags as wild ;  
Sweet are thy groves, and verdant are thy fields,  
Thine olive ripe as when Minerva smiled,  
And still his honied wealth Hymettus yields ;

There the blithe bee his fragrant fortress builds,  
 The freeborn wanderer of thy mountain-air ;  
 Apollo still thy long, long summer gilds,  
 Still in his beam Mendeli's marbles glare ;  
 Art, Glory, Freedom fail, but Nature still is fair.

Where'er we tread, 'tis haunted, holy ground ;  
 No earth of thine is lost in vulgar mould,  
 But one vast realm of wonder spreads around,  
 And all the Muse's tales seem truly told,  
 Till the sense aches with gazing to behold  
 The scenes our earliest dreams have dwelt upon :  
 Each hill and dale, each deepening glen and wold  
 Defies the power which crush'd thy temples gone :  
 Age shakes Athena's tower, but spares gray Marathon.\*

This is, indeed, delightful ; but forget not, my Lord, to whom you are indebted for the power of thus delighting us. The moment you touched this hallowed soil,

“*Sævus ubi Æacidæ telo jacet Hector, ubi ingens  
 Sarpedon : ubi tot Simois correpta sub undis  
 Scuta virûm, galeasque, et fortia corpora volvit—*” †

“ the blind old man of Scio's rocky isle,” in all his hoariness of majesty, stood before you. He suffered you not to stir a step in these consecrated regions without insisting upon making up a part of your very soul. It was his “immortal dreams,” connected with the spells of genius, that first smote upon the heart, which presented you with “the desert of old Priam's pride,” the “sacred

\* Childe Harold, Canto ii.

† Æneid. Lib. i. 103.

shore," the tombs, the ashes of departed heroes, that, in the solemn richness of our moments of enthusiasm, almost cease to be visionary. He it was that imparted this charm to your scenery, this vividness to your description, this warmth to your feeling, this rapture to your heart.

" Oh! yet—for there my steps have been;  
 These feet have press'd the sacred shore,  
 These limbs that buoyant wave hath borne—  
 Minstrel! with thee to muse, to mourn,  
 To trace again those fields of yore,  
 Believing every hillock green  
 Contains no fabled hero's ashes,  
 And that around the undoubted scene  
 Thine own "broad Hellespont" still dashes,  
 Be long my lot! and cold were he  
 Who there could gaze denying thee!" \*

True, my Lord. Cold and dead indeed must have been such a *heart of unbelief* at such a moment. What though the glorious vision was fled; the pageantry of the field no longer visible? What though the towers of Ilium were dust, and no sound heard from the deserted mountain? Still, the "magic waste" itself remained, and vestiges of ancient days, and the dead and silent mass of what once were living forms, and fond associations that thickened at every step, calling to remembrance the mournful procession of empires overthrown, of palaces destroyed, of faded grandeur, of awful and heroic spirits mingled

\* Bride of Abydos, Canto ii. 3.

with their parent earth, and turning it into the "haunted, holy ground" of succeeding generations.

"Jam silvæ steriles, et putres robore trunci  
Assaraci pressere domos, et templa deorum  
Jam lassa radice tenent; ac tota teguntur  
Pergama dumetis; etiam periere ruinæ.  
Aspicit Hesiones scopulos, silvasque latentes  
Anchisæ thalamos; quo iudex sederit antro;  
Unde puer raptus cœlo; quo vertice Nais  
Luserit Oenone: nullum est sine nomine saxum." \*

Yes, my Lord, it is to this mighty master who gave these "airy beings" a "local habitation and a name;" it is to him you owe so illustrious an accession to your fame. You struck upon the chord of his harp, "instinct with fire," and all the melodies of Heaven were infused into your soul. He fixed on the soil its everlasting glory; he made it "one vast realm of wonder" by identifying it with his song; and he has enabled you, soaring on the wings of his own exalted genius, to preserve its enchantments when all is gone, save the memorial of such identification!

But enough—I have already, I fear, trespassed too far upon the patience of my reader, wandering, forgetful of my more immediate subject, *inter fontes et flumina nota*. I will quit, therefore, the enchanted ground of your poetry, where the fairest flowers of spring send forth their fragrance

\* Luc. Pharsal. Lib. ix.



amid deadly nightshade, rank hemlock, and all the concentrated poisons of nature, and hasten towards my conclusion.

The works, my Lord, which I have in this Letter briefly alluded to, include, I believe, most of the earlier and better efforts of your muse. "Childe Harold," the "Giaour," the "Bride of Abydos," the "Corsair," and "Lara," are the productions, probably, upon which your future fame is destined to settle itself. If you can hope for immortality, these are the masterpieces of your genius that must give it. You have favoured the world with nothing since, much as you have written, that does not fall below them in poetry, and below scorn and shame in every thing except poetry.

And here, by the way, I cannot but admire that, with a sufficiency of poetical pride about you, you should consent to become so voluminous an author. Rapidity of composition is sometimes forced upon us, yet it rarely insures fame. Virgil gave to the world a perfect work in his Georgics; but his Georgics were not the product of a day. Buffon, it is said, wrote his "Etudes," &c. many times over. He did not think he consulted his reputation, or discharged his duty to posterity, before he had taxed his judgment severely in what he was to leave behind him for their instruction. There is indeed no work of immortality that must not be labour-

ed into immortality. It is not given to even the most exalted mind to send forth, at once a hasty and an enduring composition.

—————"Vos, O

Pompilius sanguis, carmen reprehendite, quod non

Multa dies et multa litura coercuit, atque

Præfectum decies non castigavit ad unguem."\*

The advice is just. The poem that is written "*currente calamo*" and thrown out hot from the forge, will insure neither fame nor respect. It is therefore only reasonable to believe that the pictures of Zeuxis will outlive those of Agatharchus; "for such works as are hastily performed have rarely a permanent strength or consummate beauty. But labour is a kind of loan to Time, which is repaid by the durableness of that which it produces†;" and though Phidias indeed executed his works with a rapidity singularly astonishing, yet must this rather be considered as a glorious exception to, than as a fixed rule for the general exertions of genius and of skill.

If, in the foregoing remarks, I have not egregiously failed in a correct estimate of their subjects, their characters, their sentiments, and their tendency, you will be found to have committed abundant offence against all that is sacred and useful; and, in this your least objectionable form, to have stood forth no mean corrupter of society. For from even this imperfect review of

\* Hor. de Art. Poet. l. 290.

† Plutarch's Life of Pericles.

the long list of your labours, it evidently, I think, appears, that you were possessed of a sufficient aptitude to produce such nuisances in the poetical world as you have since exhibited, and that, from the very infant aspirations of your muse, she has been growing up to the frightful stature of her present deformity. In these productions of your genius, without going into still darker exertions of it, we may track the heart in all its aberrations from virtue and all its progressions towards vice; from the first dawn of immodesty to the last ramifications of licentiousness; from that feebleness of mental reservation by which man hopes to extenuate offence, to the full-blown guilt of criminality where conscience becomes hardened, and hopes and fears are alike consigned to oblivion.

That in these poems there is enough of energy, is certain, and often enough of intense interest: nor must it be denied that we see in them much of that sublimity which the mind admires; much of that powerful condensation of thought, of that variety of imagery, of that grace and elegance of diction, which have ever charmed and delighted mankind. All with you is nervous, and every chord you touch full of fire and beauty. But yet, I know not where we shall find so large a body of poetry with so little of a didactic nature about it; so little of any of those instructive tendencies which the highest efforts of this

divine art are evermore fain to exhibit. Of nearly the whole series of these poems it may be observed, that they delight the fancy without enlarging the mind; that they teach nothing by which man may be made either wiser or better; that their tendency is less to instruct the understanding than to unsettle and debase the heart; and that where virtue forsakes the man, it is rather a glaring than a hallowed genius that continues faithful to the poet.

Addison taught to Akenside the art of Philosophical Poetry; and Akenside, in his "Pleasures of Imagination," has surpassed his master, and given to the world a production which will live so long as sound reason and sublime imagery find a place in the human mind. There is in this poem a solidity that recommends it to the scholar, and an elegance that attracts to its perusal the general reader. We here meet with "thoughts that breathe and words that burn;" but it is a holy warmth, a pure energy, in which they invest their subject; not a lascivious fire that scorches, and blackens and blasts wherever it spreads.

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" Guide my way  
Through fair Lyceum's walk, the green retreats  
Of Academus, and the thymy vale  
Where oft, enchanted with Socratic sounds,  
Ilissus pure devolved his tuneful stream  
In gentler murmurs\*."

\* Pleasures of Imagination, Book i. l. 590.



Yes—wisdom and virtue were the objects of his choice. His muse disdained to wander over those forbidden fields of fancy where Religion and Morality are insulted at every step, and where Science, if she be accidentally met, is little regarded and speedily dismissed.

For works like your Lordship's, delinquent in their story and their personages, it is difficult to frame any apology that will not take the shape of condemnation. It is quite impossible to do so, if these works are thrown loose upon the world with no care to counteract the perniciousness of evil sentiment by the introduction of moral correctives. In your preface, indeed, to *Childe Harold* you make some faint pretensions of this sort. Adverting to your hero, you observe, "he never was intended as an example, further than to show that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones, and that even the beauties of Nature, and the stimulus of travel (except ambition, the most powerful of all excitements) are lost on a soul so constituted, or rather misdirected." But in your capacity of a poet, where, let me ask, have you ever attempted to check these "misdirections of his soul," or to remove the evil of this "early perversion of mind and morals?" Perhaps, like the *ΑΟΙΔΟΣ* of Antiquity, you may, for the ease of conscience, be disposed to lay all impurity of

subject at the door of Jupiter, who was supposed, you know, to have the impulses and inspirations of the muse in his keeping ; or, with the wily Grecian\*, may be inclined to believe, that success sanctifies any means by which it is attained, and that that poetry which “ yields just half-a-crown a line” can have little cause to be alarmed at any imputations of indecorum.

Seriously, my Lord, this systematic neglect of any thing in the shape of a moral is always to be dreaded. It fixes the mind upon human operation only ; upon the overpowering incidents, the external manners and management of the piece. It doth not shew any operation of Providence upon passing events. It leaves God out of the world, and, precisely under circumstances where an awful retribution is called for, no retribution is beheld. The villain triumphing in his guilt, dies, and, for any thing offered by the poet to the contrary, drops into annihilation. The sufferer also expires, and sinks into the same oblivious grave. Fortunately, however, the mind is not so constituted, or so lost to its original dignity, as lastingly to admire what it cannot honestly approve. Our very taste seems to become gradually hardened against productions beautiful without utility, and sublime without devotion. We regard that poem with an unsteady affection,

\* Ulysses.

which is written only to delight, and which delights only to debase. We cannot give the heart to such an effort of genius. We peruse, admire, and abhor it.

The poetical offspring of a rival genius, you once, I think, termed "a mighty mixture of the great and base."\* This was, I presume, before you sufficiently knew either Sir Walter Scott or yourself; before you could have duly appreciated the tendency of his poetry, or suspected the future worthlessness of your own. For what, suffer me to ask, is the composition of the whole precious posse of heroes you have since that time brought upon the public stage? To say that they are fit for the gallows, is to send them away with but half their claims. They are fit for the inhabitation of your own Hades; for such demoniac feelings as your Lordship's imagination has, and as I verily believe, for the credit of human nature as well as of divine poesy, no other imagination save your Lordship's, could have invested them with. The deformed images, reversing the rules of the optician, we must, instead of pinnacling on high, place full and close before us. We shall then behold, in these hitherto worshipped gods of our idolatry, the gaping mouth, the shrinking nostril, the distended feature, and the hideous form; and thus reduced to the level of their abo-

\* English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.

mination, we shall cease to wonder that many a modern Alcmenes will be found to bear away the palm from the Minerva of Phidias.

Still that your poetry, my Lord, has been read ; that it has even greedily been sought after ; nay, that with a frenzied predilection, it has taken place of what the best of ancient or modern times has produced, the melancholy fact will hardly, I fear, permit us to doubt. To what combination of causes to attribute this, we hardly know. Some, however, offer themselves. Few perhaps minutely examine the tendency where they admire the execution of a work. What is beautiful in description, or sweet in numbers, or soothing in sentiment, or provocative of passion, is not often, by careless or indifferent readers, rejected for any defect in morals. To be entertained is frequently the sole object with such minds, and, where that entertainment is of a novel cast and exquisite in its kind, it finds an easy reception, and often an enthusiastic welcome. No one has been more indebted than your Lordship to the fascinations of the Muse for the concealment of her perversions. It has brought many an unthinking mind into bondage, and increased the number of your friends, even among those whose attachment to good morals has never been disputed. But had you stood upon the solid fame, the decorous sentiments, the useful tendency, the sublime originality of



your writings, you might have largely fallen short of your present fulness; no satiety of either reputation or emolument might have awaited your labours, nor would you, and those embarked in the same crusade, so long have fattened on the follies of your fellow-creatures.

We may distinguish another cause for the enthusiastic entertainment of your works, in the peculiar nature of the times in which they are produced. There have been periods of society, I am inclined to hope, in this country, when the poetry of Lord Byron would not have been so warmly countenanced, nor its perpetual violations of established notions, in morals and religion, so patiently endured. But with much virtue and many excellencies, the present must, perhaps, be considered as an age that may be said to flourish in the midst of excitements, and to breathe in an atmosphere that would have nearly suffocated former generations. It requires for its nourishment the most delicious and high-seasoned viands. The rarities of sea and land must be set before it; nor can any thing please its palled and debauched appetite but what luxuriates and enervates, maddens and destroys. This is the character of that host of readers which the progress of an unsound knowledge has poured forth upon society. These mere "tasters of the Pierian spring;" these half-philosophers and half-infidels who aspire to a literature at once cheap and

worthless, are found greedily to devour productions that pander for their infirmities and extenuate their crimes. With them, Harold is a hero as pious as Æneas, and Juan a personage as sagacious as Ulysses, and, in his adventures, a great deal more entertaining. We are not, therefore, to wonder that by this part of the community, (and it is daily increasing) your poetry should be congenially appreciated, and applauded to "the very echo." It is a corrosive indeed that they seem to be perfectly indifferent about the fatality of. They purchase it with avidity, swallow it down, become convulsed, turn black and die.

The estimation in which your works have been held in this country is, I think, further imputable, and that in no mean degree, to the praise that has been lavished upon them by those who, undertaking the charge of our national literature, ought also to be the guardians of our national morals. It is unfortunate, my Lord, for the soil of your nativity, as well as for your own fame, that your poetry has hitherto received far less steady reprehension than it has deserved. They who in its earlier stages should have exposed its criminality, have rather chosen, from what motive it is difficult to determine, to display and recommend its beauties. Herein they have impeached alike their judgment and their duty. They have suffered the Religion of their Country to be ridiculed, its institutions to be disparaged,

and its morality insulted, when the weapons of severe retaliation were in their power, and when, by a resolute lifting up of their voices against such authors and their productions, they might have gone far towards discountenancing the public perusal and encouragement of them. For as physicians justly prefer the prophylactic to the therapeutic branch of their profession, so will it ever be better to crush immorality in its infancy and first branchings out into vice. But this they have not done. On the contrary, they have permitted the torrent, with little serious opposition until of late, to take its course, and have thus sacrificed the virtue they either saw not the danger, or cared not, or feared to undertake the defence of.

At such a procedure in certain of our periodical criticisms we can feel no surprise. But we are both astonished and grieved when the best friends of our religion and laws; when they who have ever proved themselves the advocates of the solid virtues of the Empire, are yet among the number of those who incautiously betray her interest and "wound her rest." It has been remarked by certain of your admirers—who have ever been quite as complaisant to the muse of Lord Byron as their own powerful talents and a regard for public morality required—that you are the only poet, Cowper alone excepted, that has drawn your own portrait, and mixed your-

self up with the unfading verdure of your works.\* And for this gracious bending of a mind so magnificent to public curiosity, they seem inclined to shew as much gratitude, to the full, as the especial favour deserves. A very little reflection, however, will evince the disparity between the two instances of peculiar condescension here referred to.

The charm which attaches us to Cowper, we find, I think, no resemblance of in your Lordship. Indeed the very foundation of our approval of his mixing himself with his poetry, is a reason for condemning the like identification in yourself. It is his kind and overflowing benevolence; the tender and domestic turn of his mind, connecting itself with domestic enjoyments, with the happiness of the brute creation, with sweet retired scenery, with frequent moral reflection, with all that man believes to be virtuous and feels to be grateful, that make us pleased to see him in every successive page of his works. He joins us on the road only to heighten the relish of our prospects, and to increase the gratification of our pleasure. As we journey on together, we become better acquainted, and uneasy at the thoughts of separation. He has no reserves, no concealments. He shews us his heart, its errors and its goodness, and its goodness extenuating, and nearly cancelling its errors.

But your Lordship's self-exhibitions are of an

\* See the *Quarterly Review*, No. 37, for April 1818.



entirely different cast. You, it is true, like Cowper, expose to us your heart. But, alas! what a heart! filled alone with one overwhelming passion; with a pride, as insolent as it is weak, scorning all established notions; all that time has sanctified; all that experience has stamped with utility; all that profound and collective wisdom has pronounced venerable; treating with a narrow and unmanly contempt his contemporaries, his place of education, his country, his very kind; and delivering over to a low and coarse derision every person and object around him, which, save in his own perverted judgment, are considered as deserving of respect. Wherever Cowper appears upon the stage of his works, he brings with him virtuous feelings and a proper resentment of feelings that are not virtuous. Wherever your Lordship is pleased to figure among your heroes and to amalgamate the soul of your own sentiments with theirs, virtuous feelings are a dead lumber presently swept behind the scenes. He evermore introduces us into good company; you into company that we are glad to get rid of as speedily as we can. He joins virtue with genius, and by the instruction of the one increases the enchantment of the other; you disdainfully dissolve the connexion, and leave your genius naked and exposed. All the grounds of comparison between you will, in fact, be found to be violated, and Cowper must, by intermixing himself up with his poetry as

“an actual living man expressing his own sentiments, thoughts, hopes, and fears,”\* continue to delight, while the same conduct on your part, “covered by no very thick disguise,”\* must inevitably disgust. Though, therefore, Cowper may be, in your estimation, “no poet;” though you may have “tried to read his version of Homer, and found it impossible,”† yet, whatever be the defects of that translation, his great and original work, in spite of the occasional severity which we could sometimes wish he had softened; will be considered, probably, as giving a flat contradiction to your assertion. “The Task” is no evanescent labour. It will live—and to the congenial feelings and just admiration of posterity will endear the genius of Cowper, when Harold for his pride, Cain for his blasphemy, and Juan for his licentiousness, shall have scathed the laurels of Lord Byron, and consigned his poetry to an early and a loathed grave.

There are pauses in all human praise and censure; but the “modesty of nature” is, I think, quite overstepped with your reviewer, in his insinuating introduction to the fourth Canto of *Childe Harold*. For what is there in your religious notions to induce any wish in the reader for their communication? what in your political principles, abhorrent alike to all parties? what in your moral feelings and your sense of de-

\* Quarterly Review, *ib.*

† Letter to Rev. W. L. Bowles.

corum, both measured upon a scale that even the coarsest minds would hesitate to adopt? what in such "reflections and opinions, loves and hates, raptures and sorrows,"\* as you are pleased to entertain us with? Truly the public can feel but little "pride on being called into familiarity with a mind so powerful,"\* when that mind, in the doctrines which it promulgates, the symptoms which it exhibits, and the feelings which it elicits, is so lamentably depraved. We spurn the invitation "to witness and partake of its deep emotions,"\* when we must be content to pay for our entertainment by hearing the strongest reflections cast upon the brightest virtues, and the most prophane attacks made upon the most sacred subjects. The "noble pilgrim" may rest assured, that, with such "expositions of the sanctity of his bosom,"\* neither the present, nor any future generation will be "struck with awe." Struck indeed they must be, and most deeply and most sorrowfully; but awful feelings are only communicated through virtuous instrumentality.

To be sure, the "Teian paradise of lutes and maidens"\* was over,—the "banquet had ceased,"\*—the "emptied wine-cup lay on the ground,"\*—the "withered garland was flung aside and trodden underfoot."\* In other and plain terms, Childe Harold, with the "Carpe diem" bound upon his brow, and, in spite of the glozing divination

\* Quarterly Review, ib.

of his oracle "Balnea, vina, Venus," &c. completely surfeited with sensual indulgence, had "spurned from him the implements of former luxury."\* And in this beastly, Egyptian state of mind, the reader, introduced to "the stern pilgrim, stalking from desolation to desolation,"\* is to imagine himself, forsooth, "as in the presence of a superior Being."\* Really this is too much. To be thus invited to fall down and worship the Divinity of Lampsacus, is all too much. It is a refinement upon the very witcheries of Juan itself, that enchanting Siren whose "song is death and makes destruction please." Positively, we know not whether morality is meant to stand on its head or its heels. "Videbar mihi videre alios intrantes, alios autem exeuntes, partim ex vino vacillantes, partim hesterna potatione oscitantes. Versabatur inter hos Gallius unguentis oblitus, redimitus coronis. Humus erat immunda, lutulenta vino, coronis languidulis, et spinis cooperta piscium.†" Is the great orator here giving us the picture of a debauch, or is it merely his proem to some literary disquisition? Yours, my Lord, is a most fortunate Muse. She can get absolution without going to Rome for it; nor can we any longer wonder that, with all her blots, she shines with such refulgence, when the very apostles of orthodoxy are proud to kalendar her virtues, and,

\* Quarterly Review, ib.

† Vide Quint. Orat. Lib. viii. cap. iii.



with Ovidian rites, to employ themselves in her canonization.

Nor is a later review of your productions, when years ought to have furnished a wiser experience, of a less erroneous or injurious cast. For herein they not only boast of the encouragement which they formerly bestowed, declaring themselves with an evident complacency, of these "earlier fruits the first and warmest eulogists,"\* but even proceed to offer fresh incense upon the unhallowed altar. They scruple not to speak of certain of your dramas in the highest terms as poetical compositions, and censure is invariably softened by some subtle and refined compliment to talent. To me, indeed, they appear to applaud with a sort of nervousness running through their whole frame; and, conscious that their critique will be served up "*Jovis auribus*," to flatter and to palpitate in the same breath. They descant little upon your Lordship's impieties; little upon your immoralities, in both of which these dramas confessedly abound, and are perfectly mute on the subject of your alleged plagiarisms: but studiously seeking matter of commendation, studiously avoiding matter of censure, they meet not the crying evil of your works as a plain, honest, English-hearted journal, that goes straightforward with its criticisms and cares less about elegance of composition than

\* See Quarterly Review, July 1822, No. 54.

rectitude of thought, ought to meet it. Their duty is before them, but their duty is forgotten.

The reason which these gentlemen affect to give for their long silence towards your Lordship's faults, is, in my mind, as impotent as the works they have neglected to chastise are pernicious. Their real motives for the lenity of their conduct are best known to themselves; but they have cherished the snake that has since stung society into madness. They have lauded into notoriety, and must have a portion of the merit of affiliating themselves with, "the systematic and increasing prostitution of those splendid talents," which they are now, at length, "constrained to regard with abhorrence."\* But why, then, encourage the perusal of such works? Why send the young mind for its first nourishment to food, that, when digested, will turn to poison? Why speak of poetry that ought never to defile the purity of innocence and virtue, in such a manner as to render it almost impossible for virtue and innocence to abstain from its perusal? This might be pardonable in critics who confess they can see no serious faults in your Lordship's poetry, save a few errors of taste; and who are willing to impose upon themselves the belief that even the moral tendency of your writings is sufficiently perceptible. But it is seriously to be lamented, that a journal so distinguished, and so

\* Quarterly Review, *ib.*

able in its general disquisitions, should unhappily, on this important point, join issue with the adversaries of our faith; and especially where, speaking of the province of criticism, they prove to us their competency correctly to draw the line of critical duty. "It should watch over the correctness of language, metre, imagery, metaphor, the appropriateness of all these both to the character of the whole, and to the particular part under examination. This is one class of its duties; another, though less strictly so, is to observe upon the positive richness and variety of these ingredients, the force and glow of the language, the harmony and changing cadence of the versification, the perfection and grouping of the imagery, the number and vividness of the metaphors. Rising still higher, but still within the same limits, its duty is to consider the choice of the subject in many different points of view, the relation of the parts to each other, the unity of the whole: the conception, the sustainment, the contrast of the personages, the purity of the thoughts and the general moral effect of the poem."\* O that they could be made to recollect certain energetic reflections, on the comparison between "the manly indignation" of Whitaker, and the "courtly baseness" of Wharton, towards the historian of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."† But the mind that

\* Quarterly Rev. No. 38, Art. iii. † Ib. No. 24, Art. iii.

commits itself does not willingly fall back upon its own indiscretion.

Such critiques, however they may be admired for their taste or literature, are not what we want in the present instance and at the present period. Fine writing, nice discernment of propriety, accurate delineation of plot and character, recondite inquiries into dramatic canons, and comments on things in themselves comparatively immaterial; these, in their proper place and time, are, I allow, prime and expected excellencies. But in a review of your Lordship's poetical labours, we look for something of a more generous and fearless nature; for a courage that shall at once pluck the lion by the beard; for that stern and awful rebuke fitted to the insolence and infidelity which it chastises. We must not have every thing made to offend cast into shade; every thing calculated to seduce neglected to be held up to reproach. It is an insult to the public to let unblushing depravities of composition pass harmless, while flowers are sedulously strewn along the path, which, clad in its court vest, Censure is about to tread on tiptoe. What! because, against all hope, these literary syndics trusted that you would "ere long discover that wickedness was not strength, nor impiety courage, nor licentiousness warm-heartedness, nor an aversion to your own country philosophy,"\* was that a reason for "altogether

\* Quarterly Review, ib.



abstaining" from the notice of your polluted works? Because they conjectured that "riper years, and a longer experience, and a deeper knowledge of his own heart, and a more familiar acquaintance with that affliction to which all are heirs, and those religious principles by which affliction is turned into a blessing, would render him not only almost, but altogether such a poet as virgins might read, and Christians praise, and Englishmen take pride in,"\* was this an apology for withholding the severity of criticism, when they found that that poetry was, on the contrary, of a nature which no virgin could peruse, no Christian commend, no Englishman, with any feelings of honour or patriotism about him, regard but as a national nuisance and disgrace? Did Demosthenes so temporize, when he poured forth his thunders against the ambition of Philip; or Tully, when, in the terrors of his eloquence, he denounced the treasons of Catiline; or Paul, when "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come," and in the very plenitude of his authority and his crimes made "Felix tremble?"—My Lord, you have escaped breaking upon the wheel. The hands are feeble, the hearts are faint that could most powerfully have chastised you into virtue, or that, failing therein, could more powerfully have exposed you to scorn.

Suffer me, however, once for all to observe, in

\* Quarterly Review, ib.

opposition to these courteous criticisms, come they from what quarter and be they influenced by what motives they may, that, whatever are your powers, to your Country they have been of but little service; whatever your principles, no page of any of your writings has contributed to the security, or to the adornment of virtue. For have you not, in these writings, offended against decency and repudiated shame? Have you not, with an open disregard to the comfort and dignity of domestic life, represented almost every woman as a harlot, and every harlot as the preferred companion and friend of man? How then can we believe that your poems should be constantly read and should be never injurious; that youth should feed upon their numbers and imbibe no stain from their sentiments; that they should repose on these Idalian couches and not feel the serpent's tooth amid their flowers and their fragrance? It is morally impossible, that the mind which sits down pure to the perusal of such offensive pages should rise from it with the like purity.

How your fame will stand with posterity, it is vain to enquire, and would be idle to speculate upon. It is not improbable that something like the doubt which crossed the mind of the Senate, whether they should pronounce their deceased Emperor a tyrant or a God,\* will perplex the judgment of succeeding generations as to the credit and character of your poetry. They will

\* Tiberius. Gibbon.

hardly know if they shall deify or desecrate a genius so majestic, degrading itself by subjects and sentiments so repulsive. Plutarch, in his introduction to the life of Pericles, observes, "The mind has a power of choice, and can turn its attention to whatever objects it pleases. It ought, therefore, to employ itself in the best pursuits, not merely for the sake of contemplating what is good, but that it may be nourished and enriched by the contemplation. For as those gay and vivid colours which strengthen and clear the sight, are more grateful to the eye; so those objects of contemplation are to be chosen, which while they delight, at the same time direct the mind to the proper happiness of its nature. Such are the works of Virtue." How just and beautiful, but, with you, how despised and neglected these reflections. Your productions have had a powerful effect upon society, and you know it, and in this consciousness you intrench yourself. You know that, with an insane partiality, we are undervaluing our standard writers and placing licentious drivellers in their room. This partiality has been of late greatly extending itself. The Shakespeares and Miltons of better days are superseded by the Byrons and Shelleys, the Hunts and Moores of our own. But let us hope the infatuation is at its height, and that the garbage which the present generation luxuriates upon, posterity will nauseate and cast upon the dunghill. We shall then, my Lord,

look for the record of your achievements to other monuments than the marble of Ancyra. We shall seek it, as you inform us they now cautiously approach the pillar of De Foix,\* where, whatever be the inscriptions that illustrate and adorn its body—*turpe et miserabile!*—“weeds and odour rankle round the base.”

Nay, I do not altogether despair of a reform in the public taste, even in our own times, and that we shall return to a sounder judgment upon our adoption of a purer morality. When we seriously consider the cruel usage religion and decency have long been receiving at the hands of the poetical infidels of the day, we shall interdict the writings that go on butchering all before them of worth and virtue, of delicacy and decorum. We shall hold in our fixed disdain the wretches who infamously cut up the strong foundations of society, and who pride themselves in the facility with which they can inflict their bitter wounds. We shall anathematize these lawless revilers of virtue in proportion as they dare to anathematize Virtue herself.

We cannot do less when we recollect the injuries we have sustained, and the still greater injuries which, unopposed, our children must sustain from them. For suffer me, my Lord, to ask, with such a teacher as you have evermore shewn yourself, how it is possible for the disciples of your school to be any other than most vicious beings? What training of the reason;

\* Note to Don Juan.



what guidance of the passions; what feelings of honour; what yearnings of patriotism; what impressions of morality or religion, all of which are necessary to form a useful member of society and a Christian; have been inculcated by the perusal of any of your multifarious works? What, in their didactic capacity, do they profess to teach? How to be good? how to be great? how to be honest? how to be honourable? how to engage the esteem of God or man, or of their own hearts? Alas! I tremble for you while I speak it—their tendency is to insinuate, and that most emphatically, how man shall best *divest* himself of goodness, greatness, honour, honesty, the favour of God, and the approbation of his own conscience. If I am hasty in this deduction, I deserve censure, and censure of the severest kind; but, if I am correct, what shame, what scorn, what utter contempt and abomination do you not yourself deserve? He who brutalizes every feeling that gives dignity to social, every principle that imparts comfort to domestic life—he who represents all chastity as visionary and all virtue as vile, is not entitled to be considered, or to be treated as a man—he is a *living, literary monster*.

The time is not yet arrived, nor I fear likely, though the voice of prophecy has been sounded in our ears, when the Pilgrim, “in spite of bad metaphysics and worse politics, may yet be a person whose high talents the wise and virtuous may

enjoy without a qualifying sigh or frown." \* Alas! since this compassionate wish was uttered, there has been no signal made of repentance; no approach towards the shrine of Delphi with the supplicating bough! On the contrary, imperfection has been added to imperfection, and disgust to disgust. Indeed, if we may believe report, you are daily, my Lord, pouring out such a body of burning lava upon the world, that no rational criticism can approach, or defile itself with it. The "Parody on Southey's Vision," the "Liberal," and other conjoint efforts of the Satanic school, I leave to the castigations of the passing day, by which, though your spirit may not be broken, your heart, if it have any human flesh about it, must be wounded, and your pride mortified. When works of this description so tread upon each other, it is not the praise of posterity, it is not present praise, no, nor present profit, that is coveted. What it is, I had rather trust myself to conjecture than to declare. One consolation, however, we have left; that you and your satellites are beginning to glut the market with prophaneness and ribaldry, large as hath been the demand beyond all former precedent. The commodity is become sickening, and your whole literary career is rapidly dwindling down to infantine imbecility. Go on, and scorn will cease to point her finger. Go on, and learn,

\* Quarterly Review, April 1818, No. 37.

and feel that there is a degradation of genius too despicable for even scorn itself.

What a path, my Lord, are you relinquishing, and what a path are you pursuing! To go with the public voice rarely at variance with our public conduct; to speak the sentiments of wise and good men when we give utterance to our own; to sacrifice to the decorums of society every indecency of thought and every licentiousness of act; to believe that religion is the promoter of our temporal and the security of our future happiness, as age after age from remote antiquity, with some almighty spell upon the conscience, has believed: these are parts of the solid duty of every created being who disdains to live to no purpose, but, with a glorious ambition, would wish to be remembered by the generations that shall come after him. And only *the fool that saith in his heart, there is no God*, or the greater fool that acknowledges a God and defies him, will be content to commute such a duty for the indulgence of his passions, or to tranquillize his feelings under the scandalous neglect of it.

But at a season when all laws are trampled upon that have hitherto made Government to every civilized kingdom a blessing; when all religion is repudiated by the craft or violence of those who themselves have little or no regard for any religion; when its doctrines are disbelieved and its professors reviled by wretches whose conduct is too infamous to dread

any reproaches in return ; when authority, duty, obedience, devotion, are daily more and more losing their hold on the hearts and affections of men—at such a season that you should devote the powers of your genius to the strengthening of such demoralizing principles ; that you should pour forth a pestilential poetry which, in every page of it, unhinges society in some corner-stone or other of its majestic edifice ; that, in the bulk of this poetry, you should not only individually attack the established institutions of your own country, but, stooping to a coalition with the corrupt publications of the Continent, should produce a combined mass of malignity conspiring to overthrow not only every shadow of respect for sceptres and mitres, wherever to be found, but for even common order and decency, common honour and conscience—this is indeed to tread a fearful path to fame ; to confess that neither God nor man has any part in your affection, but that altogether discarding the virtues, you desire no dealings save with the mere turpitudes of our nature, and have no voice, no hand, no heart, but for their promulgation and prevalence !

Cæsar, my Lord, pondered with his conscience before he passed the Rubicon. He was silent with meditation and perplexed with doubt. He reflected on the miseries he should bring on his unhappy country by passing it, and the certain destruction he should entail upon himself if his



spirit now paused in its iniquity. He therefore shut his eyes on his impious dream, boldly profaned the name of his Gods, cast the die, rushed forward, triumphed, and fell. But you—consulting and paying homage to the dictates of your own wantonness of heart only; you—more inexorable than this tyrant, and more a traitor to your Country's peace; with no yearnings of humanity; no soothings of honour or of justice, of religion or of conscience—you plunge at once into the troubled stream, and never, for a moment, look back to see where Sin and Death stand ready to follow upon your track, to snuff the blood and to riot upon the carnage you are preparing for them.

Wonder not, then, that we teach all to avoid the perusal of your works who would avoid the shipwreck of conscience and of comfort, and that, while we advert to their pernicious tendency, we refrain, as much as possible, from imprudent quotations. So well known, and so ably, in many instances, analyzed, it may be sufficient to speak of them in general terms even for the purposes of particular implication. We would not willingly give a larger currency than is needful to sentiments that are cast for the destruction of all that is dignified and valuable. We have our established Religion; we know its utility. We have our Laws; we know their excellency and their efficacy. We have our free Constitution; we know its virtues and its defects. We have men

who cannot be brought, either in their devotions or their politics, to think alike, but who yet honestly and honourably *speak the truth from the heart* while they think dissonantly. We have women whose beauty is ingrafted on their chastity, and whose chastity imparts a tenfold charm to their beauty. But only let the poetry of Lord Byron become the staple commodity of the realm, and its prophane and libidinous sentiments sway the national taste,—and neither religion, nor law, nor constitution; neither dignity in man, nor reputation in woman, shall ever more give lustre to this devoted land, nor shall the British Empire be, as heretofore, a terror to the kingdoms around her by the power of her arms, but, by the prevalence of her corruption, a scorn, and a proverb, and a contaminating nuisance.

But here, my Lord, we must now separate. I cherish no hope that, in the foregoing reflections, any thing has been advanced that will prevail on you to review your writings, or to correct your opinions. There is an apathy about you which bids fair to continue you in your career of licentiousness. You will probably therefore neither ponder the tendency of your works, nor desist from defiling the world by their repetition. But if you thus persevere in inflicting upon society these visitations of your muse, you will find every hand lifted up against you and every heart set to your entire abomination. Whether you have virtue or manliness enough about you to be

uneasy on such an account, I cannot say, nor must I now stop to inquire. We may meet again, God willing, on another and a more solemn ground; a ground yet untouched, and to which this present Letter will shew but as a faint and inadequate introduction.

I know the hazard of such an undertaking as I here presume to meditate; I know its unpalatableness and its exposures. If I fail in devoting you to your own Satanic Deities, hate and neglect, and contempt await me. If I succeed, none will thank me for my labour who either admire your poetry, or approve of your sentiments. But we are not less bound in our duty to society, though society may look cold upon our endeavours. There is such a thing as resting too much in supineness. We do so when what we neglect to condemn gathers force from indulgence; when what we hesitate to oppose grows formidable from delay; when what we fear to contemplate in its gigantic dimensions, we may be destined to behold with accumulated features of distortion. We must, therefore, rise in resolution as the demoniac spirit rises in guilt. We must unsheathe the falchion, and boldly wave it, at once, over these infernal regions, or the shades will flicker round, and drink the blood of the sacrifice, and, with renewed unrighteousness, gibber forth their audacities and their crimes. Your *Cain* has been disseminated, and with no lack of deleterious effect, throughout the Empire. Your *Juan* is

running its wild career *through evil report and good report*, condemned for its infamy by the laws of the land, and by the laws of the land permitted to spread that infamy in every direction ! But though the terrors of Government sleep, public opinion is watchful, and ripe for retribution. From the chastisement which ought to attend such a production, written with decidedly immoral views, nothing must be allowed to screen you. The “*magni nominis umbra*” under which you make your insulting attacks upon religion and virtue, shall not shelter so daring, so dastardly a spirit. From the vain marble of the Persian shall be carved out the statue of the Goddess of Vengeance : from your own works shall be extracted your own imperishable criminality ; and I need not, my Lord, add—so far as I may myself happen to be a humble party concerned—that with such subjects before me, equally vile in their conception and execution, what I have said already is mercy to what I shall be constrained to say hereafter.

I remain, my Lord,

&c. &c.

CATO.

January 1, 1824.

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